Mondaiji-tachi ga iseki kara kuru soudesu yo Volume 06

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ウロボロスの連盟旗
問題児たちが異世界から来るそうですよ？
Tatsunokotarou
竜ノ湖太郎
illustration
天之有
角川スニーカー文庫

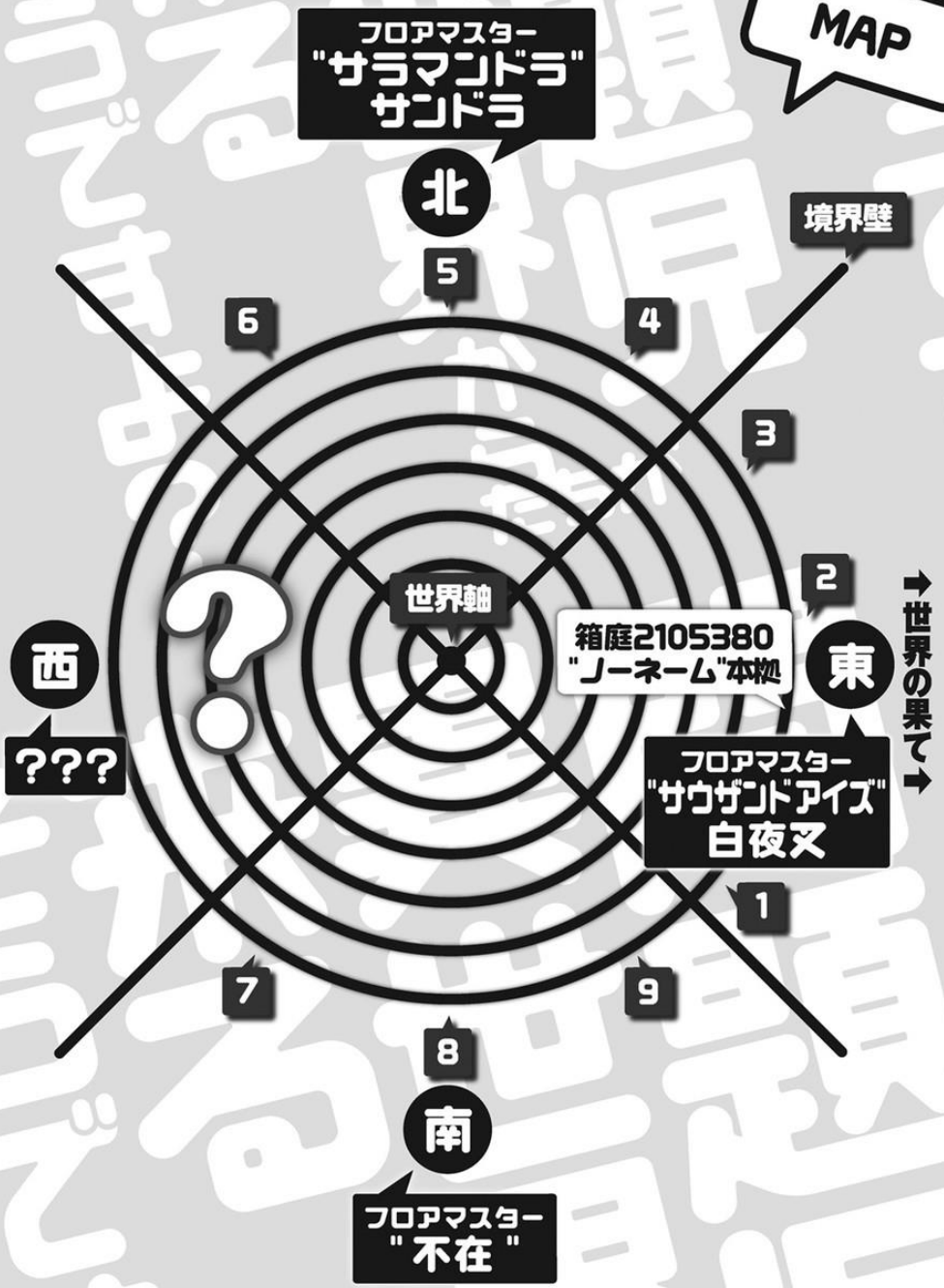
春日部耀
え、えっと……？
頭、大丈夫？
ウィラ

炎と硝子の街
〝煌焔の都〟
黒ウサギが休暇中のため
「問題児」3人は
フリーダム中！
黒ウサギ
久遠飛鳥
逆廻十六夜

ジン
――はっ、？
知らなかった。……ペスト、優しかったんだね。
ペスト

口絵・本文イラスト／天之有
口絵・本文デザイン／百足屋ユウコ（ムシカゴグラフィクス）

MAP



Character

Prologue

Part 1

The wind that blew down from the high planes swept across the rye fields, causing them to ripple in golden waves.

Following the change of the seasons, the young plants that had covered the ground like a carpet had also changed into an impressive blanket of golden yellow. While the other lands were experiencing a threatening situation of crop failure, it was only this land that had seemed to be blessed with a great estimated yield in wheat and grapes.

“Ara, it's all thanks to you, [ ]-sama, that we are able to reap such a great yield this year!”

An elderly farmer serf said, smiling at HER while gazing at the fields.

SHE had only responded with a leisurely smile. Born as one of the far off relations of the royalty, the only thing SHE could pride herself in was this land.

Even though she was of a highborn status, the society then had believed in the saying of 'A woman without talent is a virtue', her existence being only that of another possession in the family. And the future for her would either be to attract a wealthy groom or be married off.

Just another pawn to tie the knot with another family to secure the wealth of the family line---that was the worth of a daughter in her family's eyes.

The lands of HER clan was located at the borders of the country and there were no schools or nunneries around. The people around HER only saw HER as “the girl born to carry on the bloodline to the next generation”.

SHE who had been reared along the borders had naturally no friends of noble birth and at most, she would look for the children of the serfs who tilled the lands to play with.

With the mixture of dignity and tomboyishness, SHE had learned to play in the fields and dirt, while getting acquainted to the ways of farming rye.

Since her grandfather was a bibliophile, SHE had taught her self to read and write, and read through the large collection of books he left. There was an unopened book that her grandfather had left to her on a new method of farming which she tested without her father's knowing. If her father ignored the trend of those times and had allowed HER to study, the fate of her family line might have changed.

The result of her studies was this wide expanse of golden yellow rye swaying in the wind before her. An abundant harvest that has been rare of late made the farmers rejoice, and regardless of age and gender, they crowded around HER, saying words of praise.

“[ ]-sama really is incredible! Even though it has always been a bad harvest recently.”

“There hasn't been much sunlight in recent years. Seeing how the soils were getting so poor to the point of being unable to support crops, we had almost given up then .”

“According to rumors, there're farmers who will not make it pass the winter due to a scary and contagious plague..... Really, if [ ]-sama wasn’t here, God knows what would have happened…..”

Kids close to her age, bent back grannies, everyone repeatedly gave thanks for the blessings SHE shared with them. From that, one could already tell how bad the previous harvests were in the recent years.

In recent years the winters had grown more severe and farmers without sufficient food supplies were dying off one after another in a plague. The drop in immunity is most likely due to the intense labor in addition to the fall in food supplies for consecutive years.

But there was no need to worry about such problems this year.

Watching the crowd bursting with smiles, SHE felt her pride and joy swell. ——— Keho. She coughed weakly.

“……?”

She put her hand to her forehead. It seemed she had caught a cold, she said to herself.

Was it due to the new farming method being successful that she had overworked herself to the point of which the accumulated fatigue was now released all at once?

Now that she thought about it, she hadn't been resting properly recently. Basically, she had spent the whole of this year lapping up the knowledge of farming methods and had even taken up the hoe to work alongside her farming serfs to help them reform the fields.

It's best to take a rest to get my health back to normal first.

And when I'm well again, I'll work alongside them to make this land more fertile and arable again.

One year later, five years later, and ten years later. She promised in her heart that she would always want to live in this piece of land.

———But at the time, SHE did not know.

That promise of hers would turn into a curse in just a few days.

She who has loved this land more then anyone, would vehemently curse it more than anyone.

———Let my family line be cursed deep to its roots.

———Let disasters strike and rake up our lands.

Die, die, all of you should die.

Caught within pain and sadness deeper then anyone else.

Sinking into a dark, bottomless pit of loneliness.

With the dying screams of a thousand hatreds, the people who had loved her drew the curtains of her life to a close.

This would then be the origin of the Demon Lord—— the girl representing eighty million cursed spirits.

The life of the one later known as "Black Percher".

Part 2

---Reservoir of [No Name] Water tree.

Sparkling droplets of water rolled off the drip tips of the forests' new leaves.

Perhaps it was because of the five consecutive days of rainfall in the region, it became quite the talk in town as they speculated whether the increase artificial rains were due to the change of the master in the East Side.

However with the change of the [Floor Master] from a Sun God to an ancient Deity Dragon of the lake, such changes were to be expected and the residents had also accepted it in stride. Whereas, most of the [No Name]s had taken to the indoors within their Community grounds recently in an expected response to the rains and the group that were left behind were naturally having less exercise than usual.

With this morning being a rare cloudless day with a fine weather to boot, the senior group, the maid group, and the Community leader Jin Russel were replanting the young seedlings of rice they had bought for their paddy field.

Having traded the usual maid outfit with a Japanese rice farming outfit, Percher let out a loud sigh upon completing her share of the work. "……How troublesome. Replanting a plant that already germinated. Wheat is definitely better than this."

"Percher…Th…That's not true".

Lily, who had also completed her share of work, disagreed with Percher's statement while wagging her two tails.

Divided between European food preference and Japanese food preference, the two would never arrive at a compromise about the direction to be taken for the plantations.

Percher would always serve freshly baked bread when she's in charge for the Community's meals while Lily would always prepare a Japanese style of meal to be complemented with the main staple of rice.

But the power balance would soon be tipped with the completion of the paddy fields.

Perhaps that would be the reason for Percher's testy mood as she helped out in the paddy fields.

"Well fine. Anyways, the next time that new land is cleared for farming, it will definitely be planted with wheat."

"B, but our community has always planted paddy throughout the generations……"

"That's nothing to 'but' about. I already did a survey and collated the results to know that the European food preference and Japanese food preference ratio is 5:5. If you insist, I'll just lead half of the senior group to go on a strike."

Au, Lily's kitsunemimi laid back flattened against her head.

Compared to the ones in the senior group whose main jobs were housework and working the fields, the maid group's job was to support the main group. To put it simply, the maid group had far more authority in the community hierarchy.

Lily was talking to Percher as an equal because she was the leader of the senior group, but all the other kids would be afraid of Percher in the face of authority.

Jin, who was overseeing the work in the fields gave a sigh as he broke into the conversation of the two.

“Percher, Lily. As the two who are entrusted to preparing the food for your comrades in the Community, you should not be fighting. Please calmly listen to each other’s opinion and…”

“Oh, really? Which do you prefer, Jin?”

…….Eh? Jin suddenly stops his words.

Percher uses this chance to move around behind Jin and lock both his shoulders in her grip.

“Lily Let’s let Jin, the leader, decide this fair and square. The community’s land is limited. If he’s the one deciding how it will be divided, won’t we be able to continue with the decision without any more grudges to be held?”

“Wa…Wait a moment, Percher……!!”

“That conversation, hold it right there!”

The one who intruded their conversation this time, was [No Name]s maid number three.

Shirayuki-hime the snake goddess, leapt and landed with force enough to make the mud in the water field splash and her voluminous chest jiggled while she brought up her objection.

“Lily, I’ve heard it as well! Your kitsunemimi need not listen to her words! When placed before us of the Japanese Preference Alliance, the puny soldiers of the Western preference are no different than dust! Hold your chest high and retaliate her words proudly!”

Bishi! Shirayuki-hime pointed a finger at Percher.

Pecher glares back at her with veins rising at her temples as she clicked her tongue.

A panicking Lily who heard the name of ‘Japanese Preference alliance’ for the first time.

And Jin who was trapped between the two had a very bad feeling. As the two, who were fired up by their argument, were just like a collision of Fire and Ice.

“W, wait, please calm down “

“Yup. Cool it first, you Titty Snake. Our leader wants Western food. If you still want to argue…….Oh right. You should come back when you’re at least able to julienne a cabbage properly.”

“Shut up! I can do a julienne with two hours! And who are you calling Titty Snake, you idiot!!!”

“Shi, Shirayuki-sama please calm down! Yesterday didn’t you spend five hours on it and hadn’t complete the julienne?!”

Lili hugs to stop the agitated Shirayuki-hime from behind.

——Incidentally, because of a clumsy Shirayuki-hime’s wreckage of twenty four cabbages, last night’s dinner had only turned into a banquet that starred cabbages as the main ingredient.

“So, what is our leader’s opinion? Western food? Japanese food?”

“Hey! Normally one wouldn’t ask that question in this sort of timing right?”

“Child, there’s no need to consider! Meals prepared in the Japanese style is the standard meal of our community and that’s what you should being telling to that washboard!”

As Shirayuki-hime shouts, Percher dug her nails to the point where bones creaked.

“…….. Be quiet, Titty Snake. My body is based on a twelve year old, so having breasts would be a lot scarier.”

“Ha and here I was thinking what you were going to say! If you eat Lily’s delicious meals every day, you would naturally be well-endowed! But since you’re still a washboard, you should eat more rice and beans!”

“Uu……..Don’t be stupid. I’m always asking for seconds when Lily’s in charge of the meal…..!!”

Mishimishimishi! Jins bones made grinding noises as they were squeezed tightly.

Assaulted by so much pain that no words came out, Jin repeatedly tapped her hand, but Jin was no longer in her field of focus.

With hostile intent still in her eyes, Pecher stiffly moved the corner of her mouth to smile.

“Fine. Since both of us aren’t going to step down…… Lets decide things in the style of Little garden.”

“……. Oh? I see, that’s a brilliant idea. I was already in the mind of teaching you the correct way to treat your elders.”

Glaring at each other, both heightened their killing intents. At this point Jin really started to panic.

A black whirlwind sprung up around Percher.

While a eddies of water could be seen dancing around Shirayuki-hime

If the two were to clash in full force, the damage would not be a laughing matter that could be brushed aside lightly. Aside from the newly made water field, even the senior group that were busily farming would be caught in the mess.

The two fiercely glare at each other with such intensity that it seemed to require just a spark to set it off. At this point, Jin started to ponder about the options and whether it had gotten to the extent that he can only stop them by using his power as the master—

“You two. What are you doing.”

Both of them froze in their step, gulping. But this was inevitable.

Right at the moment they were about to clash, a blade of shadow that could cut steel like butter slashed between them at a speed faster than sound.

The duo awkwardly turned to look towards the direction of its source.

In the path that lead to the forest, the leader of the maid group, Head Maid Leticia, stared at the two with crimson eyes.

“Well well. I came here because of the ruckus……And heard something very interesting. I didn’t know you two were so friendly with each other that you would skip work and play Games.”

“But I finished my share of the……”

“Shut it.”

The slight smile on Leticia’s lips immediately vanished as she sharply glared at the two.

That was an order that left no room for questions and Percher couldn’t help but fall silent.

The pair of crimson eyes held a dangerous glint. She was obviously mad. Her showing this much obvious rage was rare for Leticia. But this is understandable; she had just become the Head Maid only a week ago and they already started to do such things that smeared dirt on her face, even with her warm and docile nature, she would be mad. And currently, she didn’t look hesitant to spill some blood.

The Percher in the past might not have hesitated, but the current Percher wasn’t good enough to match up to Leticia. Besides, Leticia now held the repaired gift of the dragon’s shadow. Fighting her head on would be a bad idea.

Pest retracted her winds swiftly, and Shirayuki-hime hurriedly did the same to her waters.

“I, Its not like that Leticia-Dono! We weren’t going to compete with our strength! We were trying to settle our differences using peaceful and maid-like methods……”

“Hou? A maid-like game. ……..I see. That’s good. It might be a good reference to the eight commandments of the maid group I was making.”

Smiling while her golden hair billowed in the winds, Leticia said to them:

“Then, let’s return to Headquarters and start the game. The winner is the one who can act more maid-like. The loser will have twice the amount of her usual share of work for a whole month.”

“ “What?!” ”

“Let’s see----Right. We’ll start by competing who is better at making and serving tea. I am going to be strict, so better be prepared.”

Easily catching the two that were about to make a run for it by the nape of their necks, Leticia sped off towards the headquarters.

Being left out, Jin and Lily stared at the maid group with a dazed look on their faces.

Having continued that way for half a beat longer, Lily then perked up her fox ears and made a suggestion.

“…..Um, Jin-kun. I have favor to ask, is it okay?”

“Yes. As long it has nothing to do with supporting a single preference.”

Jin nodded with a worn out look.

Lily perked up her fox ears that seemed as if she had come upon an ingenious idea:

“For the time being……I think we can use Chinese dishes for the theme of the meals.”

“……Un. That might be a good idea.”

Smiling weakly, Jin consented to Lily’s suggestion.

After checking to see that the other senior group members have completed their task, the duo made their way to join them, acting as if nothing had happened.

——Under the sunny sky without a cloud in sight, the group who had completed their labors for the day sat together to enjoy the fresh air after the rain while eating their lunch harmoniously.

Today’s [No Name] is peaceful as usual.

Chapter 1

Part 1

[No Name]s Base of operation, Entrance Hall.

After that, the Senior Group who had their lunch and the maid group gathered in the Entrance Hall of the Headquarters. The duo who were also worn out from Leticia's Maid Game had also obediently joined the lines.

Upon confirming the attendance of everyone, Jin took a step forward to announce the arrangements for the days to come.

"I guess you would already have heard……Percher and I will be setting out to Outer Gate number 54545 which is managed by [Salamandra]."

"And written in the extended invitation to us is as such: 'Please join us in the [Floor Master]s' Convention'. Of which such an act could be said to be an unprecedented treatment to us, [No Name]s."

Hearing Leticia's supplement to his words, the Senior Group children were thrilled.

The Convention was to be held in the far off North Side territories but the people attending the event would be slightly different from the previous Conventions.

The Strongest Master, Shiroyasha had already resigned from her post two months ago.

The motives of the mysterious enemies known as the Demon Lord Alliance were still unknown and it seems that only rumors of its existence had spread. Hence, to decide on their course of action from now on, the Masters of the different sectors had decided to host this Convention. And since the [No Name]s had crossed paths

with the Demon Lord Alliance twice and had also defeated both Demon Lords sent their way, they were also invited to join the Convention.

“Three days ago, Izayoi-san and the others had already left for Outer Gate number 54545. And we also plan to meet up with them later in the day. The expedition this time might be the longest one yet and I hope that everyone will be prepared to protect our Community.”

“‘ “‘ “‘ Understood ! ! ! ‘” ‘” ‘”

After the response that was loud enough to cause ears to ring, the Senior Group had noisily departed to start their tasks for the day. Seeing how energetic those children were, it gave them a little reassurance that it wouldn’t be much of a problem with their departure. Only when Jin and Percher had seen off the last of the shadows of the departing children did they turn back to face Leticia and Shirayuki-hime who were also in-charge of looking after the house.

“Leticia-san, Shirayuki-sama, we will ask of you to look after our house.”

“Roger that……But with Shirayuki-san accompanying me, it wouldn’t be a problem no matter how many intruders try to infiltrate right?”

“Well, that’s difficult to say. After all by participating in this Convention, we of [No Name] would most likely become the target of the Demon Lords. At least until the return of Gry-sama who’s out on a mission, please do not let down on your guard.”

The two from the Maid group exchanged a glance and nodded to each other.

Feeling much at ease with them in-charge, Jin turned towards Percher.

“Well then, it’s time for us to make a move.”

“……let’s go quickly. It’s almost the time for the Astral Gate to close and there would be congestion with last minute stragglers.”

Percher who didn’t like crowds urged Jin to hurry up as she started to walk ahead.

While Jin followed behind with a wry smile on his face as they left the Community’s Territory.

Part 2

—Little Garden, Outer Gate Number 54545, [Kouen, City of Brilliant Flames]

Having made their way through the Astral Gate of the East Side, a warm wind brushed their cheeks.

The huge chandelier that hung from the city's centre swayed violently as the hot winds generated from the ironworks refineries blew at it from below.

The huge chandelier, which was fifty meters in diameter, drove off the cold in the North Side and kept it warm while dyeing the whole city in the color of dusk with the warm glow that it emitted.

"It never fails to astound me no matter how many times I've seen it. With just that chandelier, it's able to prevent the cold from invading the city."

"……Yeah, just what could that be made of?"

A voice echoed his thoughts from behind.

For her, who had once fought against the [Salamandra] forces to be able to set foot in the Territory of [Salamandra] once more, was all thanks to the achievements obtained by [No Name].

"Saurian Demon King of the East Side seems to have scheduled his arrival at the Convention tomorrow. So what are we going to do during the wait?" Percher gave a little stretch as she asked her Master to confirm the schedule for the next day.

"Well, there's nothing much to do currently and it's still in the preparation phase tomorrow. And the time for all the other Masters of the other regions to assemble would still be a week away, so there's no problem with taking things slow."

Having heard this information for the first time, Percher tilted her head unhappily.

"…… I guess I will also be thoroughly interrogated as well. Such a bother." She gave a sigh as she stared broodingly at the dusk colored skies.

"That can't be helped. You are the only one who holds some information on the enemy and being the important source of information, we would naturally need your cooperation."

"……"

Hmph Percher whipped her head away. With things the way they were, she no longer had any more regrets or hesitation to sell out information on her old allies……but there was another reason that made her unwilling to tell the whole truth.

(Putting aside Rin and Aura for now…… It's best to keep the existence of His Highness a secret.)

Percher gave a listless sigh.

That white haired teen with golden irises was the commander behind Rin and Aura and the one whom the Demon Lord Alliance members call in an affectionate way as 'His Highness'. For her own ambitions, Percher did not want to expose his identity.

Though that might be so, if she were to receive a command from her master, she would still be made to tell the whole truth. The contract itself was just that sort of nasty curse.

Jin being her Master gave a troubled and wry smile as he looked up once more at the chandelier.

For the cold and freezing North Side that was unfortunate to have nutrient leached soils, that chandelier would be a Gift equivalent to the Sun.

And it wouldn't be much of an exaggeration to say that it's a Gift that represents the North Side's Master, [Salamandra] for only a handful of Communities would be able to create such a large monument to encompass the region in its Gift.

"As expected of a Community that's originally of the four digits. To have such a huge monument, I guess even Jack and the others wouldn't be able to create this right?"

"Yahoho? I won't be so sure on that."

Appearing from the flames of the torches hung along the corridor outside the Outer Gate was a huge ball of fire. The Pumpkin head Devil — Jack-O'-Lantern gave a cheerful laugh as he appeared before Jin.

And seated on his head was the leader of [Salamandra], Sandra Doltrake. Sandra, whose beautiful red hair was lightly swaying with the movement, brightened up immediately upon seeing Jin.

"Jin, it's been a long time! I just knew it that it's about time you arrived!"

"Mhm, it's been a long time, Sandra. And Jack. What are you two doing?"

"We just came from the Workroom District after listening to the suggestions on the development of the new Gift."

"Yahoho! We were just returning after the discussion when we spotted Jin-dono! As part of my own code of conduct, I needed to come greet you guys!"

Jack cheerfully laughed *Yahoho!*.

However in the next moment, the light in the hollows of Jack's eyes narrowed to thin but intense slits as he continued,

"Compared to that……Jin Russel-dono. Insulting the Flag of Azure Flames will be quite troubling to me! Our Community's techniques are good enough to create a Gift bigger than that chandelier!"

"Is…Is that for real?"

"Yahohoho! If it's faulty, we will even replace it for you……Mah…but it's just the problem of the cost of production that prevents us from doing so." Nearing the end of his words, Jack suddenly turned his pumpkin head away. It was unknown whether it's an act of regret or to hide his embarrassment but it was enough for Jin to realize that Jack had a fierce pride in his creations.

Sandra had also giggled happily by the side but that smile had also vanished from her face suddenly.

Her gaze was riveted on her former enemy—Percher, and she made a show of standing up slowly.

"……Oh, right. You have come as well, [Black Death Demon Lord]."

"Uu, Mhm. In the past two months, Percher had been together with us as a guard……"

"Oh, Sandra. Long-time no see. Your spiritual power seems to have grown quite a bit during that time as well huh?" Percher gave a leisurely smile while Sandra returned a piercing glare.

The childishness from before was long gone from her face and replacing it was the expression worthy of a Community Leader.

“On the other hand, your spiritual power seems to have diminished quite a bit. It’s so meager that it can’t be compared to your former God-class spirit level.—With just a blow, I would be able to reduce the current you into a pile of ash.”

“……Well, who knows about that? Sounds like some big words to me.”

Percher easily swatted back at Sandra who had tried to show her might with that condescending tone. But in reality, her current self didn’t have the right to retort like this.

The words she had said earlier weren’t just social pleasantries—Sandra’s spiritual power had indeed increased a few times since the last time she had battled against Percher.

(Hmph, to have defeated two Demon Lords, no wonder her power has risen this much.)

Just a few months ago, there had been Demon Lords appearing simultaneously in the East, North and South Sides.

[Salamandra] had also participated in that battle. In other words, it was [Salamandra] who defeated the Demon Lord by themselves.

The Dragon Horn of the Dragon King of the Stars and Seas was emitting a red glow and its majestic position that sat high on Sandra’s head did not seem to match the proportions of her body size. The Dragon Horn that possessed the Strongest Spiritual power had now become a part of her. It was not known what kind of trial that Sandra

had to pass through but it was clear that there's an actual rise in power to an unbelievable level.

The current atmosphere was so charged that a spark would have set it off.

Jin frantically stood between them.

"Wa…Wait a moment! It would be problematic if you guys do something here……"

" " JIN! SHUT IT!" "

Two voices from different directions shouted together. Jin could only shut his mouth at the order.

But his effort didn't seem to be futile after all as Sandra withdrew her hostility as she gave a sidelong glance at Percher and Jin.

"……I guess you two should already know that by contracting a Demon Lord under you and to summon it once more, it is to atone for the sins that caused the branding. And before the atonement is completed, I will never recognize you for who you are. Otherwise—The five comrades whom you have killed, will never be able to rest in peace."

"……Is that so? I will commit that to memory."

In an instant, a shadow seems to have fallen over Sandra's expression but she immediately turned around. And that must have been the reason for her hostility towards Percher.

Watching the lone figure of Sandra depart into the distance, no one knew how to break that silence then.

But taking the lead to tear through that heavy atmosphere was Jack's cheerful voice.

"Yahoho! She's right. Actually, Jack is also unworthy as well for I've also committed quite a number of heinous crimes in my life too."

"Ja…Jack also?"

"That's right. To atone for my sins, I've adopted the young dead spirits in [Will-O'-Wisp]."

"……"

Percher's eyes slid away to avoid their gaze for this topic should have been quite a harsh subject to be brought up before her.

But Jack only bobbled his Pumpkin head and continued with a smile, seeming to say it on purpose for her to catch his words.

"In the end, it's all the same for those who are called Demon Lords. Be it Shiroyasha-sama or Saurian Demon King-sama……and there's also Indra. Those with your sort of spiritual level only need to convert to some religion to be enlightened to a God-class spirit. Well… if you do possess the desire to reflect on your sins, I can help to introduce a saint whom I'm acquainted with to……."

"No need. I've got my own plans—And Jack. Please do not bring up the topic of Saints and Gods who couldn't even solve the problems of famine in front of **us** ever again. If you do, I won't just be giving you a simple warning only."

Percher's gaze was fiery for just a moment but she soon looked aside seemingly in a small tantrum. Looks like Jack had set foot upon her minefield.

Jin gave a bitter laugh before taking on a serious expression on his face.

"Jack, let's leave Percher and Sandra's matter for another time. Currently, what's most important is……the Community that's to join our Alliance. Are they going to participate in this large scale Convention?"

"You can be rest assured about that! I've already asked Kouryuu-sama before that to help send the letter of invitation to them. Willa has also finally agreed to make her appearance here as well. With this, they would be sure to appear before all of the [No Name]s."

Doink Doink Jack bobbled his head.

Willa the Ignis Fatuus was famous as the strongest Devil of the North Side and her true appearance had still remained a mystery. According to the rumors, it was rare that she would rush over for the hosted Game in his [Kouen City].

All that Jin knew about Willa would just be the fact that she was a devil who controlled the boundaries between life and death……And from Jack's response, it would also seem that this leader of [Will-O'-Wisp] was also quite a problem child.

"I see……But since Willa-san is coming over, I will go and meet up with everyone first. If possible, I also hope to use the opportunity to tell them about the situation of the last Community to ally with us as well."

Hai Jin gave a gloomy sigh.

There were three problem children on his side as well and the situation was much more troubling.

“Could it be that you have not told the members of [No Name] about the other party whom we are allying with?”

“No, it’s not that. The only ones who know about it are Izayoi-san and Leticia. After all it’s someone that had bad blood with [No Name] before……if I were to mess up with the timing to say it, they would no doubt oppose the plan.”

“……Then Jin-dono, what do you think about the Alliance?”

“I don’t find anything bad about it. Even if they ran to the lower levels, their Community still possesses the Strongest type of Gift. As long as the talks proceed smoothly, both sides would stand to gain from it.”

Jack nodded his pumpkin head.

“……Yahoho. Both sides to gain from it, huh? You mean to interact with them as equals?”

“Mhm. As long as the other party does not try anything to offend us, we will also abide by our social pleasantries.”

Jin stated his intent clearly and Jack nodded in satisfaction.

On the other hand, Percher who had been listening to the conversation quietly had tilted her head quizzically as she asked in surprise:

“Oi, Jin. Who’s that last candidate for the Alliance? Is it someone that Freak boy and Asuka knows?”

“Hm, I guess it’s more than just knowing, but yet a stranger? It’s a Community that has fought with [No Name] before……”

—*Shock* Jin was unable to continue his words as his facial expression became stiff.

Wondering what might have caused that sudden reaction of his, Percher followed his line of sight turn to have a look for herself.

Jin’s eyes were fixed on something high in the distant skies.

The symbol of [Kouen City]’s development, the chandelier that everyone knows about—Three figures of Sakamaki Izayoi, Kudou Asuka and Kasukabe Yō could be seen standing on it.

炎と硝子の街
〝煌焔の都〟
黒ウサギ
久遠飛鳥
逆廻十六夜
黒ウサギが休暇中のため
「問題児」3人は
フリーダム中！

"Oh Ho! The view up here is much prettier than I thought!"

"That's right. The streets that are paved with flames and glass totally looks like a jewel box lying open on the ground."

"Nn. The view is much different than that of [Underwood]."

Totally in their moment of enjoyment, were the three problem children who had boarded the chandelier without permission. And upon closer look, one could even see the bentos that they brought with them being laid out.

No matter how you look at it, it was still trespassing of another's property.

"Why….Why would Izayoi-san and the others be on that chandelier?!"

Jin cried in panic. But that was understandable. Needless to say, that chandelier was a symbol of [Salamandra]'s Authority and Order.

Climbing up there without permission and start eating bentos up there, it wouldn't be too much a punishment even if they were to be chased out of the Convention. It was even more likely that the [No Name]s reputation would be questioned.

"Any…Anyway, Percher! Take this opportunity now that people have yet to notice, to get them down now even if you have to resort to violence ……"

Sadly, it was too late.

"You BASTARDDDDDDDDDDSSSSS! WHO THE HELL ALLOWED YOU GUYS TO CLIMB UP THERE?!"

[Salamandra]'s military police had already spotted them and started to gather.

Jin hugged his head that was aching with despair as he said:

"……I say, Percher…"

"What's wrong?"

"Is it possible for you to make them incapacitated for a time being?"

Jin had spoken some incredibly dark words in a calm tone.

To even break the kindness in him to this extent, Percher secretly admired that for this sort of character would just be a wolf in sheepskin.

"Well, it's not like I'm unable to do that. Just that when they recover from the illness, won't Jin's life be in danger?"

Percher held back her urge to laugh.

"Then just give me a break. I don't intend to depart from this world yet." The young Community leader sighed softly before taking out a pen and letter which he signed,

"There's no other way. Looks like we can only call the expert to solve it."

"I've no objections to that."

"She should be in the dormitories right at the end of this corridor."

"Thanks for the info. Percher, please go now to get her."

"Yeah Yeah~got it." With a light flutter of her maid outfit, Percher left in a swirl of black winds.

Part 3

—On the other side, the problem children group.

Whipping up a whirlwind around her, Kasukabe Yō rode on the hot winds that drifted from the metalwork refineries to land on the suspended chandelier in the sky. And due to the impact of the landing being a bit too rough, there seemed to be some cracks running through the chandelier but it was still possible to ignore it if you had enough will to look away.

Sakamaki Izayoi and Kudou Asuka who had also been transported on board by her whirlwinds were also looking down upon [Kouen City] from the vantage point of the chandelier and they couldn't help voicing their awe.

"Oh Ho! The view up here is much prettier than I thought!"

"That's right. The streets that are paved with flames and glass totally looks like a jewel box lying open on the ground."

"Nn. The view is much different than that of [Underwood]."

The trio sat at the side of the huge chandelier as they looked down at the city below them.

In the distance below them, Mandra, the advisor of [Salamandra] had joined the military police and were roaring at them loudly:

"What kind of joke do you guys think you're playing?! What do you think that chandelier is huh?! Get down now, you rascals!"

Mandra's veins had budged at his temples in his rage but the trio did not take it seriously.

For they were not joking. They were just……seriously teasing those people on the ground only.

“Well, I guess it’s time to eat our late lunch.”

Izayoi and the others had already laid out the bentos bought from street vendors along the way and started to have a casual conversation.

While stuffing an Umehachin onigiri into his mouth, Izayoi seemed to have remembered something as he looked to Yō to ask a question.

“Oh right, Kasukabe, if I remembered correctly, you still have a Gift game that you signed up for right? What Gift Game was it again?”

“It’s the <<Duel of the Creators>> that had been hosted in the [Rise of the Fire Dragon] festival. This time I must get my revenge.”

“Hoho, I will be rooting for you then.”

Yō nodded her head slightly as she gulped a kombu onigiri, salmon onigiri and another kombu onigiri.

Her excited face had been stuffed full till her cheeks swelled. During that conversation, Mandra seemed to have continued his loud roaring and shouts with a look that would make one think that he might just burst those blood vessels on his face in his rage. But he was still ignored.

“Izayoi, what are your plans?”

“Me? I don’t really have any. I only wanted to take a stroll today and to accompany Ojou-sama to some place so I didn’t plan anything else other than that.”

"Oh really? But that's surprising. Normally you would have scheduled a whole list of to-dos packed side by side to the very last seconds."

"Is that so?"

"Mhm. But, passing time like this from time to time would do you good as well. I think that the usual Izayoi has always been worrying too much. I really hope that you can adjust yourself to the pace of others around you."

"That sort of request is really too much to ask for. I've already tried my best to match the pace of everyone already."

Izayoi gave a bitter smile as he replied.

The trio who were done with their meals looked at each other as they confirmed their schedule for the day.

"Ojou-sama and I will be meeting up with Jack and the others. Ochibi-sama will be responsible for the greetings to be offered to the host of the Convention while Kasukabe will be participating in the Game."

"Ara? Jack's here as well?"

"Yeap. He says that he will be introducing the last Community to join our Alliance, and……there's also a present prepared for Ojou-sama."

Izayoi gave a cryptic smile.

Hearing this for the first time, Asuka was stunned.

And at that moment, a fuming Kuro Usagi stood behind the three of them like a Niō.

But they continue to ignore her.

Izayoi took a deep fried potato onigiri and tossed it into his mouth before standing up abruptly.

“Well then, let’s go our ways from here.”

“……yeah. What’s your plan, Asuka?”

“What do you mean what’s my plan? I can’t possibly make it down by myself. I can only rely on one of you to bring me……”

“Then let Kuro Usagi help you guys with that. You bunch of PROBLEM CHILDREEEEEENNN AAAHHHHHHHHHH!”

Swish~Pak! Pak! Pak! The paper fan generated a towering wave of air that sped towards them.

Just like that, the trio were smacked off the chandelier.

Jin and Jack who saw the whole interaction that happened above could only turn pale while hugging their heads.

Part 4

— [Kouen, City of Brilliant Flames], Processing Workroom District.

After that saga, Izayoi and the others had been invited to an intense game of tag with a Madora, furious to the edge of madness, and the military police of [Salamandra] as fiery shots were fired everywhere.

"……So how's the feeling of being chased by lesser Dragons in a game of tag huh?" Kuro Usagi asked icily.

The trio had arrived at the processing workroom district that Jack and the others were waiting at though Kuro Usagi had been nagging at them with words such as the above.

Yō had separated from them along the way and it had then been a three man team since.

Walking along the corridors lit by a brilliant haze of light, Kuro Usagi puffed her cheeks as she continued to complain:

"Seriously, why is it that you guys must always be engaged in pranks……Kuro Usagi is on a rare holiday this time you know? And mind you, when it comes to the blame game, the ones to get scolded would be Jin-bocchan and Kuro Usagi who's the advisor!"

""Isn't that good?""

"That's right—-No wait, that's not good at all!"

Kuro Usagi perked her rabbit ears in her rage.

The Convention that called to all Masters to attend this time was one that held great importance to the fate of Little Garden from now on. And she had thought that Izayoi and the others would be more mature at this sort of event.

But her thoughts were too naïve. Really too naïve.

Within the three days since they arrived at the location of the Convention, the result of the reckless problem children that caused Kuro Usagi, their guardian to run around in circles was the continuous wins in low-level Gift Games. And as such, it led to a portion of Games banning them from registering as Participants. To the problem children, it had only been a whim to participate in the interesting Games hosted in regions that they had never visited before then. But who could have expected that the difference in their power levels were so great that they accidentally won too many.

Hence coming upon the realization that they needed to reflect on their actions taken thus far… the trio started to explore the tops of interesting buildings and decided to board the biggest monument in this whole city.

“Compared to all that, Kuro Usagi, I heard that there’s a district for alchemy workrooms at the end of this corridor. Is that true?”

Izayoi laughed heartily while asking with his curiosity barely contained.

Kuro Usagi drooped her shoulders, seeming to have been defeated by that smiling face as she nodded.

“YES. The details can be seen when you get there.”

Kuro Usagi replied while throwing a little tantrum.

Just as she ended her words, a sudden burst of light and a wave of heat emitted from a workroom at the end of the district caused the air to tremble. Izayoi and Asuka exchanged a glance as they started to run over with eyes shining with excitement.

“Wa……!”

The sudden flare from a pillar of fire that shot up into the skies caused Asuka to give a gasp of surprise. And that wasn’t just a normal flame.

Rounding the corner of the district, they came to face a garden that was decorated with candles lit with Azure and Coppery colored flames that were arranged in neat rows.

“Ooh……! I was under the impression that there would only be one color throughout the whole city which is the color of dusk yellow. But it seems that I’ve been proven wrong by this place.”

“Yeah. It’s so beautiful that it doesn’t give the impression of being a place that refines and works on metal……”

The duo gazed upon the flames which danced in the front yard with a sense of awe rising within them.

There were also candles that were burning in a rainbow flame hung on the trees beside the District and there were tiny fire faeries gathering beside the flame. Just by looking at this scene, anyone would have assumed that this is a warm place unlike its reality of being located in an extremely cold region.

The Sun had not set then and hence the surroundings were still dyed in a deep shade of dusk yellow. But when night falls, these rainbow candles that decorate the courtyard would definitely dye the corridor in a lovely glow of colors.

Standing beside Izayoi, Asuka's eyes were already sparkling with much enthusiasm as she started forward in small steps while taking in the sight around her and said softly:

"Flames, glass, stone work masonry and products. This sight sure is a completely different one from [Underwood]……even the type of Faerie race is the exact opposite of the ones found there."

"YES! That's because this district of workrooms is not only specialized in the processing of special top-notched metals, it's also a place where they specialize in creating glass that can become the medium for Evocations."

Hah? Asuka tilted her head quizzically as she asked:

"……Medium? Evocations?"

"YES! To put it simply, the method of producing those walking candlesticks is an example of that. To give a form to fire or earth spirits of a low spiritual level and allowing them to reside within the glass. Even if the medium were to be damaged, it would not harm the spirit. Hence it can be said to be a very good contract for those spirits who would like to increase their spiritual level."

"……Uh? Just by residing in a glass medium, the spiritual level will increase?"

Asuka tilted her head as she couldn't figure out how it worked.

Izayoi then looked at her like he just saw a fool standing before him.

"OiOi, Ojou-sama, just give it some thought and you will be able to arrive at the answer right? The mass and heat would be able to be converted into spiritual level.

When comparing spirits of the lake to the seas, it's obvious that the sea spirits will be stronger right?"

Pak! Asuka clapped her hands together as she seemed to have finally understood the theory behind it. And that was indeed the case for spiritual level calculations.

Forming mountains from rocks, forming land from hills.

Forming lakes from pools of water, forming seas from pools of lakes.

The collection of those in a larger scale would naturally form a planet.

And that's one of the reasons why the spiritual level embodied by a Celestial spirit would be called as the strongest type.

"In…Indeed. Just that I didn't think that the logic would be that simple."

"Well, that's not the only factor. The detailed calculation of the spiritual level's density in existence has to be counted with the density of time to be obtained as well."

"……what?" The duo had asked in the same tone and time. But Kuro Usagi seemed not to have heard them as she walked in front of them while using her rabbit ears to lead the way.

"Well then, let's make a move. The leader of [Will-O'-Wisp] and the last Community to join our Alliance will also be coming over today. Making them wait would leave quite a bad impression of us."

"Nn…. I guess that's true."

Kuro Usagi checked her time. There was still a minute before the Sun goes down. No matter who the last candidate for the Alliance might be, allowing them to seize a foothold in negotiations upon the first meeting wouldn't be a good thing.

Looking around at the districts paved with bricks, they passed through the crowd to walk towards the place where the districts converged. Just then—

"—'Kamikakushi'! 'Kamikakushi' has struck again!"

"Quickly contact the military police squads everywhere! Quickly!"

"Lock down the Outer walls and the Palace wall that leads to the second palace! We must definitely nab that guy this time!"

Izayoi immediately stopped in his tracks. Kuro Usagi and Asuka had also come to a stop behind him.

" …… 'Kamikakushi'?"

"YES, it seems like it. But in the North Side where many evil ghosts and Rakshasas are residing, this sort of thing isn't that rare……but their panicking faces sure look really unusual."

"How is that so?"

"Because the North Side has developed a measure against the 'Kamikakushi's. There's an organization of experts who are specialized in dealing with cases from evil spirits possessing bodies, the pranks of Divine class wind possessors to Demon kidnappings and even human trafficking cases. As long as they are on the case, most of the 'Kamikakushi's would only remain a mystery for two or three days before information is obtained on the culprit. But……"

Kuro Usagi was being evasive with her words.

—‘Kamikakushi’ is quite a simple term but in the world of Little Garden where many gods reside, the types of ‘Kamikakushi’ would also be of a diverse range. Abduction and disappearing are common acts and nothing more needs to be said about those. It also included the assassinations of individuals just for keeping their secret organizations hidden from the world. These were the sort of stuff that the Communities in the rural areas coined as ‘Kamikakushi’ as well. Hence the type of cases where ‘People suddenly disappear’ would be generally termed as ‘Kamikakushi’ in Little Garden.

Izayoi digested Kuro Usagi’s words before giving an evil laugh,

“In other words, this commotion—is a case of ‘Kamikakushi’ that **even the experts are incapable of solving?**”

Izayoi asked rhetorically with much interest in the matter. That look from his eyes were just like that of a bratty child having found a new toy. Kuro Usagi gave a sigh as she guessed his next move then.

“Hai, Kuro Usagi will not stop you but please be back by evening, okay?”

“Deal. If I’m not back by tonight—-Just take it that I’ve been ‘Kamikakushi’ed as well.”

Izayoi gave a loud hearty laugh while he sped off happily, towards the scene.

Part 5

Jin massaged his chest as he gave a sigh of relief when he had seen Kuro Usagi's arrival.

"What a relief. With Kuro Usagi around, there wouldn't be anything to worry even if she were to be up against a hundred of them all by herself."

"…….I don't mind you feeling relieved. But wouldn't it be better to learn how to depend on your own strength to solve the problems?"

Percher who had returned from her task made a dig at Jin.

Jin's expression turned fearful for a second before straightening up.

"You are right. I can't always rely on Kuro Usagi……I will have to work harder."

"……Yep. You can take your revenge after a hundred years and rest in peace then."

The unbridled way of speech caused Jin to smile weakly as he slumped his shoulders.

"Let's go, we should also make a move."

"Where to?"

"To give our greetings, of course. The Communities that will be arriving for the Convention will not only be of the Masters. There are also many Communities that have come hither for the latest information concerning the Masters' decision, so we must use this opportunity to build some reputation for ourselves."

"Oh, I see."

Percher having understood the significance, walked with Jin towards the Territory of [Salamandra]—where the towering Palace stood.

— Little Garden, Outer Gate Number 54545, [Kouen, City of Brilliant Flames] was surrounded by three Outer walls and that was the method utilized to divide the Residential areas.

The Outer wall was where the elite squads comprised of the lesser dragons set up their encampments.

The Second wall held the residential area, stage area and also the workroom districts.

While the third wall held the dormitories to house important guests as well as the hotel facilities.

And within the inner wall stood the Palace of the Community to which an endless mountain range could be seen in the distant backdrop.

The number of people who held special talents in [Salamandra] were few but they were a clan that managed to increase their cohesiveness and strength through the maintaining of the lesser dragon bloodlines.

The main force that holds the power of flight—Lesser Dragons of the Winged type numbered to a rough count of four thousand.

The count of Salamander humanoid dragons easily exceeded that by ten times. Whether it was in terms of the scale and the strength of the personnel, [Draco Greif] Alliance that were similar in standing as [Floor Master], would not be able to be compared to them.

Normally the personnel would have been deployed to various sectors to act as a defensive measure against Demon Lords but with the upcoming Convention of the

[Floor Master]s, a total of two thousand four hundred Winged Dragons were lined along the two inner walls.

The warriors of the Winged Dragon squadron possessed vermillion scales that were comparable to the strength of steel and their large bodies did not lose to the large type Eudemons in size.

Their focus on unity and numbers formed the extreme end of the spectrum when compared to the [No Name]s that focused on a few elites.

Jin looked from the corner of his eyes to take in those Winged dragons' appearances while giving them a sharp and stern eye.

(They did have this level of firepower in their possession after all. But yet only a few of them had appeared in the [Rise of the Fire Dragon] festival. Of course, it can be understandable that they might have been a little careless due to the presence of Shiroyasha-sama to grace the event……)

But, it was more believable that [Salamandra] had contacted the Demon Lord Alliance for that would make the puzzle fit.

It's only that… this was a hard to accept truth for Jin.

(As I thought, I should try to get Sandra and Percher to discuss—)

"Jin, look up."

"Eh?" Hearing Percher's voice, Jin looked up.

A figure whose face was hidden by a hood was falling towards Jin's head from the palace courtyard.

"Hey…Wait…What's happeni….!?"

Jin was squashed onto the pavement of the Palace without any sort of explanation.

Ka Cha! The neck seemed to have given off a fatal dull cracking sound. And Percher walked over leisurely to look down upon Jin.

"……Tch!"

"Clicking your tongue?! Why did you click your tongue?!"

"Clicking my tongue to express a curse upon seeing my master's safety, isn't that the normal thing to do?"

Percher answered, not even the least bit perturbed by his question.

Although Jin wanted to retort to that, the person who had fallen on him interrupted his thoughts.

"……Jin?! I'm …I'm really sorry! Are you hurt?!"

The fellow that was wrapped up by the hooded cloak had pounced onto Jin. The impact caused the shaft on the back of Jin's head to hit onto the sharpest cobble on the walkway, but he didn't have the time to care about that now.

Clutching the back of his head in pain, Jin shouted:

"San…Sandra! You…Why are you in this get-up?"

"I'm off to investigate something and had to take on a disguise to get out of the palace. Jin, want to come?"

Sandra's beautiful red hair swayed as she tilted her head as she asked while looking at him with irises that were pure and innocent.

Jin couldn't help but continue to clutch his head.

“I…I say, Sandra. You are the North Side’s [Floor Master], you shouldn’t be going out simply without telling others. Moreover, the Convention for the Masters will be hosted soon, you know?”

“Nn. That’s why the three of us have decided to solve the matter before the start of the Convention.”

“No, that’s not what I meant……”

—three of you? Jin tilted his head as he closed his mouth abruptly.

Now that he recalled about it, there had indeed been the sounds of three landings. Jin’s attention shifted away from Sandra to accost the two others who had remained silent behind Sandra.

“Are you guys members of [Salamandra]?”

“……”

The duo who wore linen hooded robes remained silent. Their height was just a little taller than Jin.

(Children….around our age too?)

Jin appraised the duo with surprise.

Sandra frantically moved to stand before them.

“These… These two aren’t suspicious characters! We have known each other for a year……Well, I would also like to introduce them to Jin……!”

Sandra waved her arms wildly as she tried to explain.

Perhaps it was too unbearable for them to watch her anymore, one of the cloaked figures took a step forward with a sigh while speaking in a voice that sounded like the crisp sound of wind chimes.

“There’s no need to be so flustered, Sandra-chan. That maid-san over there—Percher will help to guarantee our characters.”

Instantly, Percher’s face stiffened.

The duo who wore the linen coats—similar to the heights of teenagers, exchanged a look beneath their hoods before peeling it back to reveal their faces.

“What……?!”

Upon seeing their faces clearly for the first time, Percher’s thoughts seemed to have frozen. The hooded duo turned out to be a pair of teenagers: a boy and a girl.

With a gorgeous and lovely smiling face that seemed like flowers in full bloom, the beautiful glossy black hair that grew to the waistline; and the razor sharp daggers that were hunt on the leather sheathes around her waist, the appearance was just like a beautiful stalk of rose with thorns on its stem. She wore a cute miniskirt and sleeveless top that seemed to suggest the focus on ease of movement, and she would seem to be an ordinary teenage girl with just a look.

“I’m Rin and the guy over here is His Highness. Nice to meet you, Jin.”

Rin said in a crisp chime like voice as she gave a refreshing smile.

“……pleased to meet you. Because of a reason that I cannot disclose my true name, just call me anything you please.”

A white haired teenage boy with golden irises gave a light sigh behind the girl. His get-up was also quite meticulous and the formal wear that didn't fit him seemed to add a sense of maturity to him.

Judging by the appearance, he should be around the age of twelve.

During the time that the duo had introduced themselves, Percher who had stood behind to wait could already feel the pin pricks of cold along her back while her body started to tremble.

(Rin and ……His Highness? No way right? Why would they be in the Palace of [Salamandra]…….)

She gritted her teeth to hide her rising sense of worry and panic.

The relation she had with them weren't as simple as knowing each other. These two people were comrades who acted alongside her when she had led the team of [Grim Grimoire Hameln].

And they were the main force of the group temporarily named [Demon Lord Alliance].

(This is bad! If it were just Graiya or Aura, it might still be well……why must it be these two……)

Percher was very clear about the fact that Rin's Gift wasn't something that one could escape from.

She also knew the real strength of the whited haired guy with golden irises who stood beside Rin.

Percher's back was damp with cold sweat but she continued to hide her faltering in her heart as she wanted to act normally with a returned greeting. But Rin seemed to have noticed her anxiety and grabbed her hand while giving her brightest smile.

"Ara, I've missed you a lot Percher-chan! I didn't think that we would meet up here, right~?!"

"Mhm, Right…….it's been a while, Rin. And Your Highness."

"Nn. You look well. With that, I'm relieved."

"Indeed. But I didn't expect to meet again in the Territory of [Salamandra]. And at this time as well."

Hearing the words that were slightly barbed, Percher clenched her mouth shut.

Rin's tone had been quite casual but her eyes did not reflect the smile on her lips. Her gaze had clearly been one filled with killing intent earlier. In other words, these two had already entered a state of high alert to go into battle at a moment's notice.

(……this really is the most terrible time to meet again.)

Why would these two be in the palace grounds of [Salamandra]?

Why would they be with Sandra as she tries to escape the palace?

Although there were a load of questions to be answered by having time to think, but the most crucial thing for now would be the method to escape. She was just thinking up of a plan to deal with the situation when she heard the shouts of the Palace guards.

"Oi, this is bad! We can't find Sandra-sama anywhere!"

"What did you say? Could it be that she ran out again?"

"Not… Not good! Quickly start a search for her to get her back while Mandra-sama is still out!"

A group of guards rushed out of the Palace in search of Sandra. And the plan of going in a disguise to sneak out of the palace just popped in that moment.

Sandra frantically gave them the look.

"Any…Anyways, staying in this sort of place will definitely get us caught by the palace guards! Everyone, follow me first!"

"Eh……Eeeehhh?!"

Sandra pulled Jin's hand and started to hurry off in a run.

The trio who were left behind by them watched their retreating figures and then—

"Okay, let's go as well. Of course, Percher will be coming along."

"……"

"Ah, don't try to escape oh~! I really did want to see you! Because if you were to escape from here……you would certainly not have the chance to chat with us anymore."

Rin's pure and innocent words locked cuffs around Percher's choices.

Rin's words were not a simple metaphor.

If Percher really did escape this place—they would really **not have the opportunity to speak to each other again.**

(……Uu.)

Rin and His Highness were surely up to something but she could only quietly watch the development for now.

Percher gave a quiet nod before leaving the Palace.

Chapter 2

Part 1

[Kouen, City of Brilliant Flames], Processing Workroom District—Number 88th workroom.

Asuka gazed at the yellow colored pillar of smoke that rose from the brick chimney on the roof with appreciative admiration reflected in her eyes. Perhaps it was the intriguing beauty that didn't seem to match the environment of the industrial workrooms that caught her eye.

The 'Rare Sacred Iron' Soldier—Deen had already been transported to the biggest warehouse in the workroom district.

During the battle with the Huge Dragon in [Underwood], Deen had been wrecked up badly and had been handed over to [Will-O'-Wisp] for the repairs.

Seeing Deen being fully repaired to his original state, Asuka gave a cheer in delight.

"Deen…… You're fixed! It's good to see you……!"

"DeN"

The single eye of Deen lit up as he responded to his master's voice. His body frame should have been strapped down firmly earlier on but probably due to being notified on Asuka's arrival, they have released those restrictions on him.

"He had been in quite a wrecked up state……so I'm taking it that this is the gift that Izayoi's been talking about?"

"Yahohohohoho! Of course it's not just that!"

A blaze started to pour out of a candle that sat on one of the candle holders built in the wall.

“It’s been some time, good to see you, Asuka-san! Kuro Usagi-san!”

“YES! It’s good to see that you are still your usual self, Jack-san!”

“Nn, that’s right. Hearing your cheerful voice puts me in cheerful mood too.”

Asuka and Kuro Usagi, who had cocked her rabbit-ears to the side, gave their greetings together.

Sweeping their gazes around the room, the two murmured admiringly.

“Come to think about it, is it really okay for us to borrow such a large workroom? It looks replete with all sorts of equipment……the price couldn’t have been small, right?”

“Yahoho! Actually, this place was loaned to us with Sala-sama’s introduction! This is also the studio of Sala-sama while she was still a member of [Salamandra]!”

The original studio of Sala——hearing Jack’s words, Asuka took another look around the warehouse.

Handcrafted candlesticks could be seen lining the walls, giving the studio a uniquely playful atmosphere. The scattered equipment looked worn at their handles, giving the feel of being used quite often in their master’s projects and the sense of nostalgia left behind by their owner. And at the same time, the room was filled with a very feminine and yet authoritative style of decoration which fitted the description of Sala perfectly.

After taking in the room’s layout with her eyes,

"Well then, Jack what's that Gift you spoke of?" Asuka suddenly stopped her pacing as she looked to Jack with anticipation shining in her eyes.

The flames in Jack's pumpkin head had also taken on a sharper intensity as he replied:

"Hoho……We have called you over today for the fulfillment of one of the Alliance conditions—the refining process and ritual for endowing the Gift properties to the [Diamond Iron Ore] has just completed."

"Is that for real?"

"Yes. And besides the new equipment that have been created according to the list placed in the orders, we have also prepared two new Gifts for Asuka-san……Having said that, we're still not officially in an Alliance as of yet and we do not have the right to procure a cache of [Diamond Iron Ore] either. So we could only use what little that remained of the ores kept in the treasury of [No Name]."

A serious flame burnt in the depths of the hollowed out eye holes of the pumpkin head.

The ores that he spoke of most probably referred to the [Diamond Iron Ore] that was brought to [Six Scars].

"It's just that these ores were too little in this sort of urgent situation. So after obtaining the permission from Izayoi-san and Kasukabe-san, I've prioritized the creation of Gifts for Asuka-san."

"That….Wouldn't that mean ……you are giving me three Gifts?"

"Amazing! With this, it will certainly give a great boost to your combat prowess!"

Kuro Usagi started to wave her arms in joy.

The unexpected Gifts caused Asuka to be surprised to the point of being disconcerted in her thoughts.

At the same time, she started to feel uneasy with the arrangement. Kudou Asuka's body was just that of an ordinary girl and this had been proven many times in her fights. No matter how strong the equipment may be, it might just be a waste of effort. That was something that she learnt in her fight with Percher and she had kept that lesson well in mind.

Asuka clenched her fists as she muttered in a rarely seen polite tone.

"To prepare these many Gifts at one go……When I'm already struggling with Deen. Wouldn't it have been better to create Gifts for Izayoi or Kasukabe-san……"

"But Asuka-san. There's no doubt that you will die if you continue fighting Demon Lords with just your current get-up, you know?"

"Wha……!" Asuka swallowed the rest of her question.

Perhaps that half of a shout was due to her surprise from hearing such blunt words coming from the gentlemanly Jack which was quite unthinkable in itself. But regarding that straightforward comment that didn't have a scrape of reservation, Asuka was clear about that fact as well. Unable to come up with a retort, Asuka could only droop her shoulders in a dejected manner. And Jack only smiled as he started to bobble his pumpkin head while continuing:

"Asuka-san, the three of you hold a different talent respectively. And amongst them, your talent could be said to be the rarest—another way to put describe it would be to liken it as a cherry blossom that is late to bloom."

“I’m…..a cheery blossom that is late to bloom?”

“That’s right. In order to allow the new petals to fully unfurl in its full glory, I’ll present you with these Gifts—The masterpieces that [Will-O'-Wisp] created through the pooling of our resources and strengths! After obtaining these Gifts, the fog of Asuka-san’s worries will disperse like dew with the coming of a new dawn!”

So we hope that you will believe in yourself.

The fiery will and words of motivation seemed to flow deep into Asuka’s heart. The Pumpkin gentleman held Asuka’s hands as he returned the wine red Gift Card to its rightful owner once more. As the Gift card had been left in his care all these while.

Seeming to have been affected by Jack’s contagious cheerful smile, Asuka’s taut face started to relax.

“Thank you Jack. The Gift you’ve made for me……I will use it well.”

“Yahoho, please use it well then! For I’m sure that would really make those two happy as well!”

……Mhm? Asuka tilted her head.

One would be Ayesha and the other would be referring to whom?

But before she could ask the question, Jack had already happily continued with his words.

“Come on, now let’s proceed to the Stadium of the Game Stage area!”

“Game…Game Stage?”

"That's right! Though I've seen Asuka-san's battle all this while……what you need the most is to be more comfortable with using the Gifts! And that means to accumulate as much battle experience as possible! Then the battle tactics of Garol would also be put to practical use right?! Yahohoho!" Jack's pumpkin head revolved in the air as he laughed.

Feeling a sense of dread, Asuka and Kuro Usagi exchanged a surprised glance at each other.

"Could… Could it be that ……you want me to join the Game? For real?"

"That's~~~ OF COURSE! As part of the commemoration for the first ever hosting of the Convention, we will not be collecting any Participating fee you know?! Please use this chance—And pluck the crown in the Game of <Duel of Creators> in just a breath."

"Wha……"The both of them opened their mouths in a half exclaim before getting stumped. The reason didn't need to be said.

Yō would also be participating in the Game. The both of them had just wanted to voice out their protests when there came the sound of heavy footsteps moving in what seemed to be a bad temper and a familiar voice that interrupted their words.

"HAAAAAAAAAH? The ones who are here to retrieve Deen and 'Fortress' is actually the [No Name]s? What's this all about? I've not heard about this, you know?

"Please…Please wait a moment! It's better to leave this place to Jack-sama to……"

"Quit your nagging! The one who repaired those two items is none other than my great self! All of you better shut your traps!"

“Don’t …Laius-sama!”

“Eh?” the sound escaped the lips of Asuka and Kuro Usagi in surprise as they looked at each other.

“……Kuro Usagi, I’m not dreaming right? I seemed to have heard a familiar despicable name being mentioned.”

“Des…Despicable, Kuro Usagi will leave that aside for now but that name of Laius, could it be……”

In the next moment, the door that led to the back was kicked open.

And appearing from the billowing dust cloud was a man who had a [Medusa Head] Flag engraved before his chest.

Previously defeated by the [No Name]s a few months earlier—Laius of [Perseus] was staring at them in rage.

Part 2

Little Garden, Outer Gate Number 54545's Stage Area, The Arena before the [Tablet of the Sea of Stars].

Kasukabe Yō had just arrived in the area and the sparkling sculptures of glass flowers that decorated the area around her made it one of the most beautiful places within [Kouen City]. But it wasn't merely those glass pieces that made the corridor such a beautiful place. It was the addition of precious gemstones that gave off the twinkling light of stars that made the place take on a dream-like quality.

This corridor also served as an area to commemorate the generations of crafters who had helped in the building as well as maintaining of the North Side Territories for various monuments in remembrance of the crafters that had been gathered in this place.

And if Yō were to come through as the champion of the Game such as the <Duel of Creators> during the Birth of the Fire Dragon Matsuri, she would obtain the rights to carve her Community's name and Flag onto the Corridor of Displays. Aside from that, if one won in a Game hosted to compete within the technique and art of crafted masterpieces, they would also obtain the right to display their accomplishment in the stone pedestal of the Corridor of Displays.

Looking around at the countless precious masterpieces showcased around her, Yō started to feel a sense of doubt taking seed in her heart as she tilted her head.

(……Is it really possible for me to take part in this Game?)

Just as mentioned earlier, the North Side is where Gifts of refining metals, manufacturing by crystallizations, alchemical arts and the like circulated widely.

And perhaps it was due to the climate of this region, the population of Humans were dense in these areas. The fact that the race of Humans didn't possess much power was one that everyone knew well. As long as the birth is an ordinary one, it wouldn't be too much to say that Humans ranked at the lowest rungs of the power ladder. But in the North Side, the talent of creating Gifts through the techniques of Human or Spirit alike were highly prized treasures there.

Hence the creativity of Humankind in developing techniques and skills received high praise and the North soon became a place that made it easier for Humankind to call it their home. Amongst them were Communities that have left their mark on the [Tablet of the Sea of Stars], having had their strength recognized and receiving high praise from [Salamandra].

And those who were now gathered in the arena were all fierce competitors who would wish to leave mark of their accomplishments behind for generations to come. In a large collection of strong competitors, would it really be a good idea for herself to be mixed in amongst them……Yō started to ponder such stuff as she stared blankly in front of her.

(Just visiting this Corridor of Displays has already been quite a pleasant experience for me. Even for the Community, I shouldn't allow any smear to get on our reputation……right?)

Yō tilted her head as she started to give it some thought. Having been brought up in an environment that lacked much interactions with others, Yō didn't know much about these sort of things. Just shortly before, Yō might still be able to ask Calico Cat's opinion about it, but he's no longer by her side. Having been injured in the

battle against the huge Dragon, he had decided to retire and spend the rest of his life in [Underwood]'s Great Tree.

(……)

Yō continued to stare at the displays with a distant look in her eyes.

That was something that was decided after they had both sat down to talk about it.

Calico cat had been born on the same day as Yō and he's an old cat who has seen through fourteen winters with her. It could even be said that he's closer than her next of kin.

And precisely due to that reason, Calico cat was very worried with Yō's capability in interacting with other Humans more than anyone else.

"Ojou, you aren't alone anymore, you need to learn how to live amongst humans in society from today onwards."

Having been told of such a thing by Calico who was heavily covered in bandages, Yō couldn't bring herself to deny it. After all, it was a separation that would have to come sooner or later. Though she might feel lonely, but the rejection of such a request would have been equivalent to betraying the other.

So Yō hid her sadness as she handed Calico cat over to Garol of [Six Scars] while entrusting the future care and treatment of the wounds to them. The people of [Six Scars] who were also future allies in their Alliance had also readily agreed to her request to care for Calico Cat while treating him like one of their own.

Having received the assurance from others that the environment of the Great Tree would contribute to a speedy recovery, the human and cat then set off on their separate paths. Hence from that day onwards, Yō had to reach her own conclusions.

For if she couldn't do that, she wouldn't be able to face Calico Cat squarely with pride.

(Nn. Garol-san had already given me encouragement by making known his support for me. I must do my best as well.)

Yō clenched her fists tightly.

He who had claimed to be her father, Kasukabe Koumei's friend, Garol had really helped the [No Name]s a lot. But he never brought up any talk of his past with her father and had only left this line for her when they were about to go their separate ways—

"Currently, I can't say anything about it. But if you really want to know Koumei, you will need to chase after his footsteps. Only then will you understand what kind of man he is."

The next two months following that day, Yō had tried her best to search for a trace of her father's whereabouts but had come up with nothing.

Leticia had also been adamant with a reply of 'Its fine to just wait for now'. And so she had come to visit the Corridor of Displays to look at the [Tablet of Sea of Stars].

(It's said that there are only a handful of Corridors of Displays in Little Garden and I had thought that it might be a place to start searching for my father's crafted pieces……But it sure seems like it's not that easy after all.)

Troubled by the lack of results, Yō crossed her arms. There was still another method for her to get a lead. And that was to participate in the Game while registering the [Genome Tree] as the specific Gift to be used while observing the reaction of the crowd then.

But to appear in the Game where many famous blacksmiths and sculptors had signed up to vie for glory, it still gave her the feeling of uneasiness. If it were only a blemish to her name and becoming a laughing stock, it might have been much easier to bear but she didn't want to bring shame to [No Name] again because of that.

Plonk!

Ouch. That hurts. But Yō still couldn't think up of a solution. She, who couldn't arrive at a plan could only reach up to take the sharp yet blunt weapon that had been dropped on her head.

(……what is this?)

That was a blunt weapon that took the appearance of a cross while its topmost was a rounded piece. From the shape of it, it would be more similar to a 'hammer' than a cross.

……No, isn't it literally a hammer?

(This is really dangerous. If it weren't me, a person might have been gravely injured.)

Yō looked around her but it's a really impossible task to find the culprit amongst the crowd that milled around the Corridor of displays. Tilting her head quizzically, Yō

thought to herself that perhaps in the craftsman city of [Kouen City], hammers dropping from nowhere might just be a common thing. Just then—

Plonk!

Another strike came flying at her.

Yō gripped the hammer in her hand tightly. Once might have passed for a coincidence but twice would make it clearly intentional. Moreover for the person to escape Yō's five senses that were as sharp as a wild beast, that would make the throw truly unusual.

(……)

She quietly took on a battle stance. Since there's a second, a third wouldn't be that surprising.

Closing her eyes to focus on her hearing, Yō prepared herself for the third wave.

Yō wasn't that forgiving to laugh while receiving some unknown attacks. Izayoi had said that the market rate for him was to return things tenfold. Whereas for Yō, she would want to return it a hundredfold.

Preparing to sense the hammer that would fly out from the crowd at her—

"…..Are you alright?"

"?!!"

Yō almost leapt out of her skin.

Suddenly having a stranger striking up a conversation with her, Yō had almost fallen to the ground in her surprise.

And that was to be expected for in the state where Yō had heightened her senses to the maximum, for this female stranger to approach this close would have been impossible. But it was a fact that the young lady stood before her and it could be said to be a flawless sneak attack.

“Uh, um……”

かすかべ春日部よう耀
え、えっと……？
頭、大丈夫？
ウィラ

Yō's mouth was half agape as she looked at the girl who seemed to be the same age as herself.

Then, she was stumped by surprise once more.

The young lady had a sweet baby face with a slightly wavy twin tailed hairdo, her curvaceous body-line didn't seem to match the age that she appeared to be from just the face alone. Although her height did not differ greatly from Yō's, her breasts were filled out like those of a grown woman. The black and blue laced Gothic Lolita outfit boldly revealed her legs and part of her breasts, making her look very attractive.

The bold choice of dressing would have made others to think that she's trying to lure men to fall for the temptations but those eyes of hers were pure and innocent while defenselessly revealing large parts of her body. Be it guys or girls, anyone would definitely have their pulse set racing at the sight of such a girl.

But with such an overly tempting and attractive appearance, it had instead triggered the caution in Yō's heart.

(This child……isn't human?)

Doll-like—A demon in the form of a girl. That was the line that flashed through Yō's mind.

The girl did not notice Yō's caution as she moved closer look at Yō's face:

"……is your head fine?"

"Ah, Nn. It's fine. But who are you?"

The girl gave a slight nod.

The girl's every action was incredibly cute and just that slight nod already compounded to the overall cuteness. Even if it's Yō, she would also be unable to beat up such a cute girl. So possessing that level of understanding, Yō—

Swish!

"!"

Only gave a chop with her hand with a strength that wasn't too great. … just enough to smash a boulder.

"Let's call it quits with that."

"……Nn."

The mysterious girl nodded her head. It would seem that she had given it some self-reflection.

Yō sorted out her thoughts as she planned to make a self-introduction but the girl was a step ahead in taking the initiative.

"You are joining the Game too?"

"……Game? You mean the <Duel of Creators>?"

The girl nodded her head as the pair of pure and innocent eyes stared at Yō fixedly.

Though Yō's a laconic person, this girl seemed to be even more reserved with her words. It's truly Yō's first time to have met such a strong opponent for she had never met a girl who's more laconic than herself.

Yō, who hasn't decided whether to turn up for the event, nodded her head while replying:

"……Nn. I will be joining."

A smile spread across the girl's face.

"Great. With this, I can complete the promise I've made to Koumei."

"Eh—"At the moment when Yō was left speechless—

The girl vanished without any warning.

"—That must be a lie right?!"

Vanishing into thin air. That's right, just vanishing.

It wasn't by disguising her scent or a rapid get-away nor was it taking to the skies. Such biological disguises would not be able to fool the senses of Yō.

The girl who had suddenly appeared had also simply vanished before Yō without a trace.

(How did she do that……No compared to that……)

Koumei—That was the name which people who are close to her father, Kasukabe Koumei, used to call him. Then, the girl might have been referring to her father by saying the name 'Koumei'.

(Could it be……that I've actually found a lead on my father's whereabouts?)

Yō gazed towards the arena from the Corridor of Displays as her eyes were no longer clouded with the troubled look of earlier.

Looks like she had finally found a reason to appear in the ring.

While looking out for the figure of the sweet looking girl, Yō made her way to the registration office.

Part 3

—[Ruby Cave], Underground bathhouse

The North had abundant precipitation in the form of snow but it didn't really rain much.

And that was no exception for [Kouen City] that received the protection of the chandelier. It was the responsibility for the [Floor Master] for the intervention with the weather of Little Garden but there's always an inherent difference in the climates of the North Side as compared to the East Side that experiences a spring season throughout the whole year. Of which the Masters would be unable to eliminate with their powers even if they wanted to.

It's all thanks to the bonfires on the chandelier that the snow rarely collected on the pathways. But the canals were another matter entirely as it often froze up when the temperatures drop with the onset of a heavy snowfall.

And to solve that problem, they created underground canals.

[Kouen City] was a natural fortress that had its entire back of its Outer Wall built against a huge mountain range. The mountain range that was covered with a dense forest served as a huge natural reservoir, forming the lifeline that runs through the lands.

Through means of channelization, they led the flow into the underground canals to control the flow.

The bathhouse that Percher and the others were visiting at the moment was one that was close to the by-product of the heat manufacturing plant which prevents the freezing of the flow in the channels.

(*……No. Compared to all that… Isn't the progress of the situation way too strange?*)

Thinking up to that point, Percher, who was in the children's changing room, gave a sigh of relief.

Rin and Sandra who had also escaped into the changing room were happily undressing themselves with a harmonious atmosphere that seemed to take the things that were happening around them in their stride.

"Right~A Public bath for children. And naturally there won't be any adults coming here."

"Nn. Although it's not their usual business hours, but I've asked the staff at the counter to let us in."

"Ooh! As expected of Sandra! That's just an abuse of authority as the leader of the Community!"

And it was just as Rin had said. This sort of situation was the worst possible scenario for Percher for in the bathhouse for children, there was definitely not a chance for them to meet the other members of [No Name].

(*Being unable to meet up with Asuka and the others……Then I should at least tell Jin in on the situation……*)

The 'Piper of Hamelin' Ring that was worn on Jin's right hand bore witness to their contract. And due to the contract that forges the relation between them as Master and subordinate, they were able to communicate through the contract ring in secret.

It would be simple for her to tell Jin that 'Rin and His Highness are our enemies' through the link in the contract ring, but—

(*……in the instant that their identities are exposed, they would be sure to show their true colors and bare their fangs.*)

The crux of the problem now was whether Jin's capable of hiding it from them while he receives the message.

Although Jin did possess the capabilities in bargaining which he has started to pick up, but he's still fundamentally a youth and Percher wasn't that confident in him being able to hide his inner feelings.

No matter how much Percher was rattled by this situation, she could only rein those feelings in for now.

(*Although I don't know what sort of scheme they are up to, but those two are willing to play along with the current situation. Perhaps it's just underestimating us, but this condition of the situation is still quite good.*)

In any case, I must first dig up the intent of the other party.

Having reached a decision in her thoughts, Percher started to undress by undoing the buttons on her maid outfit. Though she really hated baths, but she didn't want to let them out of her sight. So Percher followed Rin and Sandra who had proceeded towards the baths before her—

"AH, Jin! You guys came in first?!"

And she tripped over herself.

" "——Hah……?!" "

Percher and Jin gave a loud cry in surprise and the reason needn't be said.

This was a normal bathhouse that was similar to any other in the world——which means that everyone was naked in there.

Part 4

—Let's backtrack time by a little.

Jin who had taken off his clothes in a jiffy sat beside a pedestal that sprayed hot water to wash his hair.

With a practiced action of pressing out the shampoo, Jin made it foam and bubble. And he could tell from just the fragrance given off by the shampoo that the public bath had prepared shampoo that could be said to be of a high quality.

This should be shampoo made from the distilled essence of petals. And it could be said to be a luxury item to the [No Name]s.

Rubbing the white foamy shampoo suds in his palms—Jin was a bit troubled.

The source of the troubles was of course that white haired golden iris youth who sat silently in a corner.

(*This…This is so awkward……*)

It's just been a quarter of an hour since they first met each other and his real name was still unknown. Within just that short span of meeting each other, he had already ended up in this situation where they saw each other's naked body.

The situation defied conventional logic—in a certain sense, Jin did not have any method to break this strange atmosphere around him.

"……"

Jin slid a sidelong glance.

The youth who was called His Highness was sitting before the mirror to be used for washing one's hair without a word nor did he do anything at all as he just sat in a

straight posture while staring at the pump that dispensed the shampoo. That scene was really strange.

The shampoo found in this place was definitely a highly priced product and it was clear that the living standards between a 5 digit and a 7 digit was just that wide.

But this youth's gaze didn't seem to be one that looked at it in distaste—But it was more of a gaze from one who had never seen such a thing before and it was curiosity that filled his eyes.

"Erm, that… Your Highness-kun?"

"Yes, is something the matter?"

The serious reply from the youth responded to Jin's nickname for him, causing Jin to feel more troubled.

Originally thinking to warm the atmosphere with a joke of calling him with that 'Your Highness-kun' that didn't seem to be a superior nor a junior way of addressing someone, but when used upon this youth that seemed unbound by the rules of this world, jokes didn't seem to have an effect on him.

It seems like I must use a much simpler joke to launch my attack, Jin thought to himself while setting his determination for the task.

"That……even if you keep staring at the pump for the shampoo……"

"Oh is that so? So this is called a pump."

Uwa!

"It….It is called a pump. Shampoo is contained within it."

"Oh, I see, I get it now. Pressing this part will cause a rise in the internal pressure and cause the fluid to rise from within. Though it's a simple structure but it sure is a landmark invention."

"That…That's right."

"Nn." His Highness reached out his hand to the shampoo pump in admiration.

At this point, Jin pursed his lips in an unpleasant foreboding.

"Could it be….you have never washed your hair……"

"That's rude. My hair is washed every day."

"Really?"

"Yes. It's just that I don't wash it myself."

His Highness replied with a serious expression.

……seems like he's telling the truth. His hair was normally washed by others.

Jin could only give a long sigh while looking up at the ceiling.

"……Just asking in advance, do you know how to wash your hair?"

"Although I'm not too sure, but I do know of the theory behind it. The water and shampoo comes into contact with air to have a chemical reaction and then rubbing it to form bubbles, that's all, right?"

"Ye…Yes! You need to use the foam to remove the oil from your hair."

"So it's like that. Jin's really knowledgeable. Okay—"

His Highness excitedly pressed on the pump. Was it just overthinking things a bit? For it seemed like he was really enjoying this process of forming a large amount of foamy bubbles in his hands before washing his hair with a face of amazement.

Jin asked with a wry smile:

“Normally your hair is washed by a servant of yours?”

“Ah, Nn. There are three exclusive attendants to follow me but Graiya Oji-chan’s really clumsy with his movements and the task of washing my hair is mainly left to Aura or Rin.”

“Rin……Could it be that girl just now? You allow girls to wash your hair?”

“Yes, that’s right.”

His Highness lifted his head of white hair while having a surprised expression but that movement caused a bit of the shampoo suds to get into his eye and he quickly closed his eyes seemingly in pain. It would seem that His Highness had really never washed his hair on his own before.

Jin was dumbfounded as his mouth was agape, but he raised a serious question:

“Your Highness……is the successor of your Community?”

“Precisely because I am that I’ve gotten such an intimate nickname like that.”

“And your real name?”

“Secret. Jin, if you are able to guess it, I will tell you.”

He game a smile as he lifted his head again. This time, it caused some suds to drip into his other eye and he used his hand to rub it in reflex. The first time washing his hair was instantly turned into a tragedy.

"……washing my own hair by myself sure is tough."

Muttering while tolerating his pain. It should have been pain enough to become irritable but perhaps this coolness was part of his talent and Jin was secretly impressed.

Just as he applied the soap suds to his hair and was about to scrub—

"AH, Jin! You guys came in first?!"

Jin tripped over himself. And it was while in his sitting position that he tripped together with the stool to turn a full half circle with the momentum.

" "——Hah……?!" "

This was a normal bathhouse that was similar to any other in the world——which means that everyone was naked in there.

"You…You must be lying right?"

Of course it wasn't a lie, nor was it a metaphor.

Five youths of both guys and girls were all without their clothes—No, to be more precise, with the exception of Rin who wrapped a bath towel around herself, the other four youths of both guys and girls were all naked.

But Sandra paid it no mind as she rushed over with her red hair swaying behind her.

"Jin, it's been three years since we last bathed together! And I remember that we used to bathe together in the past too!"

"Ara, so Jin also did get help from others. And here I thought that I was the only weird one."

"Eh? Nno…wawait, that's not it…!"

Jin frantically tried to explain as he stammered on his words.

Ignoring Jin's situation, Rin who was wrapped up in a bath towel walked up to His Highness.

"Uwa! His Highness is actually washing his own hair! What mind of emotional change could have caused this?!"

"No, it's not an emotional influence but a situational one. If there's no one around to help me, I would just have to do it alone right?"

"Ooh, I see!" Rin replied, impressed. She then started to help His Highness to wash his white hair in a matter-of-factly. ……What sort of relation did those two have? It really seemed to be getting weirder by the moment.

But upon seeing their actions, Sandra had also taken an interest in it as she came to stand behind Jin.

"Then, let me help Jin to wash as well!"

"San…Sandra!"

Sandra happily wriggled her fingers in excitement. To avoid any misunderstanding, she's still currently in the nude.

Jin covered the part that logically required his covering as he ran around the bathhouse with a red face. And Sandra happily chased after him while Rin looked on at them in a happy mood.

Only Percher was alone in a corner covering her body as she muttered wordlessly to the Heavens:

(*……this sort of situation. What do you want me to do?*)

Chapter 3

Part 1

ー[Kouen, City of Brilliant Flames], North Side's Workroom District.

The scene where the "Kamikakushi" occurred was swarming with people.

Located at a certain guest room of a certain Inn along the Workroom District it was in a building that loaned workrooms to outsiders.

The military police squads have locked down the brick-paved streets while Mandra, advisor of [Salamandra], stood at the front shouting commands.

And he gave both a frown and a sigh, upon catching sight of Izayoi's figure making his way through the crowd.

"……What are you here for? There's nothing here to give you the entertainment you seek."

"That's not true. I definitely see entertainment here. Didn't a "Kamikakushi" just occur?"

Izayoi laughed heartily while crossing over the railing that was used to block off the area.

The expressions of the military police squad had already been set in a grimace in annoyance but none of them went to stop him.

They had already had a taste of Izayoi's strength for the past few days and it had long passed the point of annoyance and a sickening repetition to them. Even if they seized him now, the retaliation would be far worse.

“Well then, have you guys found clues on the criminal?”

“No. It has been carried out in the same method but there is still no headway on the criminal’s identity.”

“……same method? You mean to say that this “Kamikakushi” has been a serial crime?”

“Oh right. I can bring you along if you want to see the scene of the crime, but just make sure not to mess up anything.”

Mandra, who had slowly learnt the approach to deal with Izayoi, opened the door to the Inn for the both of them.

Although it was the scene of the crime, the interior of the Inn looked perfectly fine and not a trace of struggle could be seen, retaining the look of a normal Inn on a normal day.

Upon reaching the third story of the Inn, Mandra stopped in his tracks before a room,

“And this room is the scene of the ‘Kamikakushi’”, opening the door to enter with Izayoi trailing after him.

Sure enough, the interior of the room was just as orderly as the rest of the items in the building, having left no traces of struggle, but a trace of life could still be felt lingering in the room marking the recent presence of its original owner.

The overly calm atmosphere of the place made it difficult to believe that this was the scene of a kidnap.

“……”

With exception for the characters of “混” and a message on an arrow.

“ ‘游手好闲’…… and the character of “混”. Those are Chinese characters right?”

“Ah yes, or it might also be the name of the technique or some sort of message. But whatever it might be for, similar characters had also been found at the scenes of the other two previous cases. Hence we think that it might be the doings of the same spell master.”

“Oh? And what were the others?”

Izayoi’s eyes started to light up with curiosity.

According to Mandra, the series of ‘Kamikakushi’ had three lines of written characters that looked like Chinese characters.

- **游手好**闲
- **虚度光阴**
- **一事无成**

And those were the three lines left at the scenes.

Izayoi slowly chewed on those lines in his mind while frowning.

“……are those the only clues?”

“This is the third person to be kidnapped."

“Oh…… Then is there a similarity in the victims?”

“Well, nothing much is special about them……No, wait, there’s one. The victims to disappear are all young children.”

Hearing Mandra's casual way of saying it, Izayoi clicked his tongue in irritation.

"……that really is an annoying criminal."

"Oh? That touched your heartstrings?"

"Yes, it did. Actually, it's not just a touch but the feeling is more of bringing a saw to the strings itself."

Though it was said in a joking manner, but the tone of his words had carried an obvious pulse of anger.

Initially just taking interest in the business of 'Kamikakushi', Izayoi was now filled with hostility towards the criminal.

Taken aback by the sudden change in demeanor, Mandra asked casually:

"Though it might be a little presumptuous of me, but I never expected you to be the kind to be interested with this sort of things."

"You are right about that. It's not my style to impose my feelings of sympathy or judge them to be good or bad—But, even if it's me, I also have a line that cannot be crossed as well. And this fellow has just broken my first rule. Do you expect me to just stand-by and watch now?"

Izayoi's words had made clear his stand on the matter—no matter what price it took, Izayoi would want to use his own two hands to bring judgment upon the criminal.

And that made Mandra's surprise grow even more.

"……the rule that you talk about… Does it refer to the targeting of children?"

"Nope. I've always lived with this one rule; A strong power should only be used against a strong opponent."

A sharp gaze made his eyes glint dangerously as he said his own unwritten rule that was strongly rooted in his heart.

Be it their physical bodies or their mentality, children were unquestionably the weaker group in society.

And it was precisely so that Izayoi could not forgive those people who are stronger for lifting a hand against children.

For Izayoi who was born with an absolute power from the very first day, this was one iron-clad rule to him. And his gaze was one that dared anyone around him to oppose.

"About the case of the 'Kamikakushi', I've more or less gotten a grasp on the situation. If I meet someone that looks like a suspect, I will use appropriate measures to catch the person. So you guys can continue with the securing of the region for the Convention preparation phrase for now."

"……Hmph. Then, remember to use my name when you do the reporting and handing over of the suspect. The military police squads should understand then."

Izayoi raised a hand as he left to signal his understanding. Somehow feeling that taking the stairs would be too troublesome, Izayoi stretched his leg to step on the window frame.

Just then, something on the roof of the next workroom building caught his attention.

No matter how you look at it, the colorful fumes that were puffing out of that workroom's chimney seemed to be a suspicious ritual being held. The yellowish green fumes were spreading across the clear skies that had nary a cloud for miles around.

But that wasn't the point.

The one that Izayoi stared at intently was一a stranger dressed up in a hooded robe that had the character of "混"sewn on it,

"……Oi, Mandra."

"Why? Could it be that now you want our help after saying all that?"

"Well, yeah, sorry about earlier but that seems to be the case一Please surround the area below. The 'Kamikakushi' has appeared."

Saying that, Izayoi leapt out of the window like a bullet shot from its barrel.

Traveling at a speed that left his afterimages behind, Izayoi instantaneously closed the distance between himself and that robed guy with the "混"character. However, just like he were waiting for Izayoi to come close, the "混" character flew into the air at the last moment.

The mysterious figure twisted its body and dodged the sudden attack from Izayoi.

Seeing how his opponent had executed such a fine dodge that seemed like a swallow's flight in the skies, it caused Izayoi to immediately heighten his awareness.

(*This guy…… he's not an ordinary 'Kamikakushi'?*)

Izayoi took on a battle stance on the brick roof.

At the same time, Mandra leaned out from the window frame to shout at him: “Oi, where’s he? Where’s the main suspect for the ‘Kamikakushi’?”

“Hah? What are you saying? The fellow with that“混”character on his robes is standing right in front of me一“

Saying up till that point, he closed his mouth. For he must have noticed the weird look on Mandra’s face as Mandra kept scanning the grounds in search for the person and had not noticed the guy with the “混”character standing before Izayoi.

Seeing that sort of unnatural behavior, Izayoi clicked in tongue in annoyance.

“Could it be that ……he can’t see this guy?”

“Oh, you have quite a good intuition huh? You must be the new guy that everyone’s talking about on the streets?”

The figure of the ‘Kamikakushi’ suddenly spoke up and gave a laugh from under that burlap hood. It would seem that this fellow was a type of Obake(化生) that possessed intellect.

Izayoi was a little anxious as he turned back to look at his opponent and he caught on soon enough.

Although he did not know what kind of Gift it was, but this criminal with the “混”character seemed to be capable of hiding his presence from others. And if there wasn’t a way to counter that, it would be very difficult for others to find the criminal.

Izayoi gave a fearless laugh as he used his forefinger to provoke his opponent with a taunt.

“Well, I know not of what street or alley you are talking about, but if you really care about those kind of rumors, you are more than welcomed to test it for yourself.一Bring it on, you ‘Kamikakushi’. And watch how I tear apart your lousy and despicable tricks.”

“Heheh, your words are quite big! I must say that I do admire that cockiness, but newbie, I'd be taking you up on the offer then!”

Retrieving a type of scroll from the burlap robe with the“混”character, the person released its string seal to display the characters of “虚度光阴”.

Is that the truth behind the ‘Kamikakushi’? With just the unrolling of the scroll, the colorful [Kouen City] was gradually turned into a shade of black, white and grey and the colors of the surroundings were just stolen with that move.

The sudden change caused Izayoi to be placed in his highest alert.

(*This is……Wiping out the colors from the City?!*)

If one were to forcefully give a description of that scene, it would be similar to the spray of ink into the air.

However, the strange sight did not seem to end there. What was taken away from [Kouen City] was more than the loss of the brilliance and colors for even the movements of the residents had also been frozen.

“Heaheheheh! What’s the matter now, newbie?! Don’t just stand there in a daze! I had been a little cautious about you after hearing that you managed to impress that Saurian Demon King but it seems like you are just another small fry! No, actually it’s really lucky for me to find such a nice duck!!”

The “混”character guy held his sides as he laughed loudly. Judging from his words and actions, it would seem that his technique was supposed to freeze Izayoi’s movements. And Izayoi had only played along by holding still to try figure out the technique activation.

(*I see. This black and white world is the result of “虚度光阴”……?*)

“虚度光阴”is a Chinese idiom that has the meaning of ‘spending time by idling and achieving nothing in the end’. In terms of the meaning, it was much lazier than the

Japanese proverb of ‘Time flies like an arrow’. And in Chinese, the “混”character also has a similar meaning.

The “混”character in Japanese is usually used to in conjunction with another character 混合 and it means to mix and combine. But in Chinese, such a phrase can also be used to mean ‘not doing anything and passing days just as it is’.”

Collating all these information, Izayoi deciphered the phenomenon of the black and white landscape before him.

(*Considering that he stripped away the colors ー the phenomenon of taking away part of the light spectrum, we can safely assume that he used some sort of technique to cause time to stop. But from how this scene is playing out, the metaphorical appearance should also be taken into consideration as well.*)

Standing quietly while using the time to consider the situation from all perspectives. What’s fortunate was that the enemy was still laughing heartily.

(*The proverb of ‘Time flies like an arrow’ is used to express the feeling of time flowing pass them. If ‘stripping away the colors’ were to be the appearance of ‘passing days without doing anything’ ー then “虚度光阴” will be the Gift that stops the feeling of time in his enemies? Ha, sounds like a suitable Gift for a ‘Kamikakushi’.*)

And since this Gift was that strong, it should come with some additional conditions for it to be usable. If only the condition were to be fulfilled by the kidnapping of children, it would explain the serial ‘Kamikakushi’ incidents.

But, such a strong Gift being used only on small children? That was a conclusion that made Izayoi seethed in anger.

He coldly swept back his hair.

"一Ha. As a 'Kamikakushi', I guess you can be said to have quite a good technique……But if I were to describe it, it would surely be the worst type of skill."

"……Heah….Hah?"

The despicable laugh suddenly stopped in mid-laugh.

The fellow with the "混"character had finally realized that his technique had not worked on Izayoi and his laughter immediately became an exclamation in surprise as he backed away three steps while roaring:

"Wait, give me a moment! Why are you still able to move?! You are able to see me right?! If that's the case, why didn't my technique work?!"

"Oh?" Izayoi responded to that unexpected revelation.

Following that, a ferocious smile floated to Izayoi's face as his eyes started to glint dangerously.

"You have just said some interesting words too."

"……Uu……!!!"

"Seems to me that the Gift is related to 'seeing you' and it then leads to 'whether your technique becomes effective'…… Hmph. I've already guessed your real identity, you third rate Demon Lord!"

"What…… You, you?!"

"Well then, what's left would be to assess your spiritual power. From the powers of a 'Kamikakushi', to be an ape god would be quite good. But oh well, what a waste, calling you that would really be rude to the Gods for no matter how you look at it, you are at most an ape spirit only. If there's something wrong with my conjectures, I'm all ears, you know? [Demon King of Confusion]-sama."

In contrast with his arrogant words, Izayoi's tone had been one filled with his sense of boredom. However, for the figure in long robes—the one who was called [Demon King of Confusion], that sort of information was equivalent to a fatal blow to him.

"You… You smelly brat……!! Your brains sure work very fast eh?!"

Demon King of Confusion started to retreat stealthily as he was starting to get spooked.

He mustn't have expected anyone to be able to guess his identity with just those words that he had uttered.

(*Psh……seems like the rumors of him being on par with Saurian Demon King are true after all. And it's better for me to hide now that my trump card technique has been seen through.*)

Putting his strength into his leg to step up onto the ledge of the brick room, Demon King of Confusion was prepared to leap off when Izayoi declared with a ferocious glint in his eyes:

"Prepare yourself. For I will get rid of you before the real 'Kamikakushi' starts—!!"

The starting sprint that seemed like an explosion caused the footing below his feet to crack with the force as Izayoi charged forth.

Faced with such an overwhelming chase from behind that shortened the distance between them rapidly, Demon King of Confusion could only dodge in desperation. Although he was one of the fallen, but he was still a Demon Lord and his movements were quite skillful and dexterous.

It was not known whether it was Izayoi's continuous pressing of the attacks that caused the technique of "虚度光阴"to be released, for the colors had suddenly been restored to [Kouen City].

"You….You must be joking! What are you?! Aren't you just a human little brat?!"

"That's rude! I'm a pure bred, 100% original human you know?!"

"Don't take me as a fool! How can there be such a human like you?!"

Yeah. That's true. Somehow, Izayoi felt that many people were agreeing with that question and their agreements were making their way into his ears.

Demon King of Confusion who was now solely concentrating on escaping his pursuer was swiftly bounding along the rooftops while making his way towards the city centre.

Deliberately fleeing to a place with lots of people, he might be searching for the next prey. If that were to be so, he would have to be caught as soon as possible.

A slight smile lifted the sides of Izayoi's lips.

(*This is interesting. A game of tag with the 'Kamikakushi'? Looks like I have to stay sharp…!*)

Izayoi continued to chase after Demon King of Confusion with amusement.

And upon the release of the “虚度光阴”technique, Mandra who had returned to his senses, could only see them off with a stumped look on his face.

Part 2

ー[Ruby Cave], Underground bathhouse

While Izayoi and the Demon King of Confusion were playing their game of tag in the accommodation sector of the cityー

The five young boys and girls in the Konyokuburo were now in the midst of soaking in the sentō with their bodies covered, after accepting the strong request from Jin and Percher to ‘cover all the portions that should be covered’.

Perhaps it was something along their younger days or maybe it was due to the environment that they grew up in, Jin whose sense of shame had grown with the years and Percher who wasn’t that loose with her rules to allow her naked skin to be shown, they had both reached a consensus for once on this matter.

“……It might sound strange coming from me, but that sure is a complicated relation between master and servant.”

“Stop making a fuzz. If you have an opinion about it, then get out.”

Percher sat at the ledge of the sentō’s pool while crossing her legs. Although this angle seemed a little dangerous, but the parts to be covered were properly covered. The snowy skin with those slender limbs were enough to allow others to imagine her beauty in a few years’ time. Unfortunately, this group of five weren't old enough to understand such a wondrous thought.

Deliberately clearing his throat, Jin asked Sandra:

“Right. Sandra, what was the matter that you wanted to investigate? Does it have anything to do with those two?”

"Hm. I guess we should let them introduce themselves first."

Sandra gave them a look while giving them the cue.

Rin and His Highness nodded together.

"We are from a Trader's Community. I'm Rin and this is His Highness."

"Usually in such a situation, we should say the name of our Community…… But, regrettably, due to the rule of our Community, we cannot tell it to others."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Um. To be honest, we actually specialize in the trading of very dangerous goods. So we only practice the tradition of accepting customers who know of our Community's name. If Jin wants to know more about us, we hope that you will be able to find out the name of our Community on your own."

"Oh, I see." Jin expressed his agreement while feeling a little impressed.

At the same time, Percher was also impressed.

(*I see. When put in that way, there wouldn't be a pressure to say out their Community's name. The intimate nickname of [His Highness] would also be mistaken as a cover-up for the real name.*)

What a formidable move.

Although the aim of the duo had not been figured out yet, Percher felt that this might just be part of their pretense.

"It's been two years since we met Sandra-chan. It should be the time when there was an internal struggle in the Community to become the successor. It was also the time that [Salamandra] fell to the Five digits right?"

"Yes, you're right on that. Due to a departure of the successor of choice, Sala, it caused quite an uproar and confusion then. Our community also provided mercenary services and the ones who were dispatched were us."

"Eh?" Jin couldn't help but give a small cry in surprise. But that was only to be expected.

The two before him looked only just a little into the early double digit ages, that started with ten. Assuming that they were of the same age as Jin, which is eleven years old, and that they had participated in the internal struggle two years ago, a simple calculation would have told as much that they would have been nine years old or so at that time.

"You guys had already started to participate in Gift Games then?"

"Yep…… This shouldn't be too strange, right? In the world of Little Garden, not participating in Gift Games would be the end of our survival right?"

"Although it wasn't pleasant, but it would have been more difficult to survive without engaging in a battle. The Gift Games hosted in the City were all filled with a thick hue of proxy wars. There were economical wars, war on logistics and even those based on religion. As long as one was recognized as a possessor of strength, that sufficed to make a contribution to the Community, age did not matter when it came to the choosing of combat strength for Gift Games."

The duo had said their thoughts on the matter quite fluently and Jin nodded his head, seeming to sympathize with their situation and thoughts.

“Could it be that you two had already started to participate in Games even earlier than that?”

“Nope. Our first Game was two years ago.”

“……is that so? That’s great.”

“ “?” ”

Rin and His Highness exchanged a look while cocking their heads to one side.

But Jin ignored their small actions and returned back to the topic.

“Then for you two to be here, I take it that Sandra has hired you guys?”

“That’s right. As for the summary of the events……hearing it from Sandra-chan might be faster right?”

“Mhm.”

Seeing Rin’s look towards her direction, Sandra nodded her head in assent.

“There has been a series of child disappearance occurring in [Kouen City] recently.”

“Disappearance of children?”

Jin repeated her words in surprise. For these sort of cases did not warrant the need for the [Floor Master], Sandra herself, to make a move. Moreover, such cases of disappearance were quite common in the North Side territories.

Sandra might have picked up on Jin’s thoughts as she quickly shook her head to continue her explanation:

"Yes, I know what's going through your mind now and what you want to say but this serial crime has a high possibility to be the doing of a Demon or Ghost type being and I would say that I'm almost 80-90% certain that……this is a type of 'Kamikakushi'."

"Then it should be left to the professional organizations. [Salamandra] also has those right?"

"Of course. They are truly professionals who would have resolved normal disappearances with ease……But the situation this time is different. They are unable to figure out the rules of this 'Kamikakushi'."

The roundabout way of explaining caused Jin to be more doubtful—But at the instant that he heard the word of 'rules', he took a sharp breath.

To have the word 'rules', it would mean that it was part of a 'Game'.

When it came to a Game that required a [Floor Master] to take action, it would then leave only one possibility in mind.

"Could it be that……this is a 'Kamikakushi' that is related to a Demon Lord?"

"Mhm. Though it is not confirmed, but if it could be resolved earlier, we might still be able to prevent any major losses."

Jin nodded in assent. If there's a possibility that the series of disappearance were related to a Demon Lord, it would then be an urgent matter that should not be left alone. Especially when it comes to the 'Kamikakushi' of Demon Lords, for its often accompanied with a strong curse or power that is able to dominate others.

The Game that Percher had hosted previously, [The PIED PIPER OF HAMELIN] had also been a Game that imitated the legend of ‘Kamikakushi’s.

Jin looked towards Percher as he asked.

“Percher, the game of [Piper of Hamelin] had also been one that used the subject of ‘Kamikakushi’s. Do you have any clue on this one?”

Percher frowned as she started to ponder.

“……Have you found the [Geass Roll] yet?”

“Nope. But there were a few characters left at the scene.”

“Characters? What are they?”

Just as the question ended, Sandra had already written the three lines of characters in the air with her flames.

- **游手好**闲
- **虚度光阴**
- **一事无成**

Percher had read the words aloud all in a breath but she tilted her head while making an expression of being unable to grasp the meaning.

“……Jin, what does that mean?”

“That……In a nutshell—it means ‘lazing around throughout the days and not being able to accomplish anything at all’. And all the three phrases refer to the same thing. Well, are those all the clues we have?”

“No, there’s still one more. There’s also a “混”character written on the wall of the crime scenes.”

Rin scratched her head while recalling, and she added:

“This “混”character is the bottleneck to narrow our search. It’s said that there’s a similar challenge letter being sent to the Conference of [Floor Master]s.”

“A letter of Challenge?”

“Mhm. Due to the rude contents in the letter, I will just summarize it. It mainly talks about wanting to attack [Floor Master]s.”

Jin frowned.

That sort of arrogance to target a [Floor Master] is definitely the style of Demon Lords.

“I see…… that means to say, the letter might be a warning before the Demon Lord’s attack.”

“Well, only Demon Lords would specifically choose [Floor Master]s to launch their attacks.”

Jin crossed his arms and nodded his head as he digested the information given to him from the two of them.

“Hm, let’s tidy up all the information that we have at the moment:

One, The disappearance of children had been a serial incident.

Two, There has been message-like characters of ‘游手好闲’, ‘虚度光阴’ and ‘一事无成’ left behind at the scene of the crime.

Three, Similarly at the scene of the crime, there's a mysterious message of a "混"character written on the wall.

Four, The warning letter to the imminent attack on the [Floor Master]s had also been marked with a "混"character.

Is that all?"

"Mhm." Sandra nodded her head.

Listening up to that point, Percher who sat by the said felt a growing sense of foreboding. The reason need not be said. After all, the ones who were the masterminds behind the previous Demon Lord attacks were just sitting before her taking a leisurely soak in the pool.

The culprit of this case was highly probable to be those two as well.

(……*Seriously, what could they be up to now?*)

Percher slid her eyes over to look at Rin and His Highness from the corner of her eyes. Those two were leisurely soaking in the pool while watching the progress of the situation. That was definitely a calmness that came from the huge power gap.

The problem was that though they were calm, they had yet to reveal a gap of vulnerability to be exploited.

Be it escape or a battle, it would be a different matter altogether if one were to make the first move to decide the victory or defeat. But the fact was that these two people did not allow a chink in their armor to appear for even a moment.

(…….*Forget it, if luck's on our side, we might be able to meet that freak rabbit or freak guy on the streets.*)

Percher sank her body into the pool as she tried the optimistic approach.

In other words, she had given up on herself.

Forming her hands into a water gun, she squirted hot water on Jin's face while giving a sidelong glance at Sandra:

"Come to think about it, was that letter warning of an attack really sent by a demon lord? If it were like the previous attacks where they tried to attack only one [Floor Master] of each area, it would be understandable. But this is going to be the Convention where all the [Floor Master]'s are to gather, don't you think there might be another reason for the threat?"

"Another reason?"

"Yes. For example, the person might be targeting the precious Gifts displayed in this [Kouen City] and the [Tablet of the Sea of Stars]. Perhaps it's a feint to say that they will attack the [Floor Master] when they actually want to achieve something else?"

Realizing that Percher's conjecture had a point as well, Sandra sank into a pensive silence.

"The warning of the attack is just a feint while it's actually for another purpose? But we do not have such an important item……"

"Well… there's one."

Three pairs of eyes turned to Rin instantly.

Rin who had initially been silent smiled sweetly as she placed her hands on her chest.

"There's a Demon Lord that is sealed and hibernating within [Kouen City]. And it's not just any normal Demon Lord. It's the Demon Lord who only required just a

quarter of an hour to destroy the [Highborn of Little Garden]'s City, and can even fight on par with the Juniten."

Hearing the words that didn't match up to her sweet smiling face, Jin and Percher couldn't help but hold their breaths.

"Destroying the [Highborn's of Little Garden]…… Could it be referring to the hometown of Kuro Usagi?"

"And isn't Juniten the strongest warrior Gods? It's difficult to believe that such a large Demon lord, that can actually fight on par with them, is sleeping within this City……"

The both of them looked to Sandra as they voiced their surprise.

Sandra nodded her head slightly as she was placed in an awkward position.

"Well… Act… Actually I've only first heard of it after becoming the [Floor Master]. It's just that my father told me that it's the highest order of secrets that cannot be mentioned to anyone….. Rin, how did you know about it?"

"Of course it's the rumors of the commercial world. It's said that word spreads in a scary manner right? This was one of those rumors with a low level of credibility. A Demon Lord that is of the Juniten level would definitely be of the strongest species. And no one would have believed in the rumors that such a monster would be sealed within the city, am I right?"

Rin smiled as she dodged the question.

Sandra's expression was still unconvinced and worried but it soon became pensive as she gave it some serious thought.

"……shouldn't be a problem right? The key to the seal had disappeared since three years ago."

"Key?"

"No, nothing—Compared to that, the words just now cannot be leaked out. Regarding those rumors, I will use my Authority as a Master to issue a gag order on it. Such information must not be leaked no matter what. I think you should know it well that leaking out such information would be punishable. Especially Jin and Your Highness, being the representatives of your Communities, you must be especially mindful."

The two of them nodded at the same time. Percher who knew that His Highness was one of the Demon Lord Alliance members was now experiencing a turmoil in her heart, but she could not say it out. So she could only quietly continue to squirt her water gun at Jin.

Jin who had ignored her all this while finally pressed down on Percher's hand to stop her.

"Percher, is it really fun to do that?"

"Seeing how troubled you become, it's indeed interesting."

"Yeah, I knew it. Haiz……" Jin gave a sigh and Percher used the opportunity to squirt another shot into his mouth.

……Seems like she's really happy. Though the person in question might not have noticed it, but every time that she squirted a shot of water, the edges of her lips would slightly curve upwards.

Jin coughed a little before standing up to summarize the conversation earlier:

“Anyways, I’ve understood the situation. We will start by searching for the ‘Kamikakushi’ and if we find something, we will then call upon the military police of [Salamandra] for support. Is that alright with you?”

“You said search…… could it be that you’ve some idea on the culprit?”

“Mhm. Ah, but there’s a possibility that I’m wrong. Can’t say that I’m absolutely certain……”

Jin seemed to have come upon something to start on, but he shut his mouth due to his lack of confidence. Seeing his hesitation, His Highness reproached him:

“Jin, I cannot agree with that kind of attitude of yours. It will only cause more trouble for the people around you. Being the leader of the Community, you should clearly express your thoughts.”

His golden eyes shone with a light that seemed to denounce Jin’s behavior. Those were words that only His Highness had the right to say for he too was a leader of a Community.

Jin clapped his cheeks in self-reflection before urging everyone to leave the pool.

“We will first get outside and confirm the scene of the crime. Then we will arrange to make an appointment with Kouryuu-san to meet up with him tomorrow.”

“Kouryuu……Saurian Demon King?”

Percher asked in surprise.

Jin seemed to shut his mouth in his lack of confidence, but recalling the words of His Highness, he straightened his back to announce:

“I believe that the enemy’s target isn’t the [Floor Master]s—but Kouryuu-san who has become the acting Master.”

“……What?”

“ ‘游手好闲’, ‘虚度光阴’, ‘一事无成’. These Chinese idioms mean the same thing: ‘lazing around throughout the days and not being able to accomplish anything at all’. If all those weren’t related to the techniques of the culprit but a message left behind for a [Floor Master], the only one that would fit the conditions to be insulted would be Kouryuu-san who has been termed as a ‘Floating withered log’. Wouldn’t this message then be a protest to his ascension to the acting [Floor Master]?”

“In… Indeed. It really fits in well in a logical sense……”

“Wow , that’s amazing, really amazing! Jin has the qualifications to become a Game creator!”

Sandra and Rin clapped their hands happily.

But Percher who was sitting aside was looking at Rin in surprise. If this were a trap laid down by them, Jin’s conjecture would have been an obstacle to them.

(*Could it be that this is just to mislead……*)

Rin is one of the Game creators of the Demon Lord Alliance. She would not create a Game that would run contrary to her wishes and there must be some kind of catch to this.

But Percher’s anxiety was uncalled for as Jin had already crawled out of the pool to start in the direction of his plan.

“The earliest time for Kouryuu-san to arrive at [Kouen City] would be tomorrow morning. And before that, let’s go have a look at the crime scenes and poke around. Sandra, do you know where are the crime scenes?”

“Of course”, Sandra said as she too got up from the pool to point towards the direction of the crime scene.

“The first ‘Kamikakushi’ occurred at the [Tablet of Sea of Stars]— the place where the <Duel of Creators> is hosted.”

Part 3

ー[Kouen, City of Brilliant Flames], Processing Workroom District-Number 88th workroom.

The guy who entered by kicking down the door ー Laius ー stared at Asuka and Kuro Usagi threateningly,

“Damnable [No Name]'s! ……You still dare to show your face before me…”

“Who gave you the permission to smash that back door HAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH?!”

Before being sent flying by a punch from an irate Jack. Receiving a critical hit from a fist, twice the size of his skull, connecting into his back, Laius was sent flying and spinning three and a half rounds before sinking into the wall.

The Pumpkin head of Jack was dyed a fiery red as he narrowed his hollowed out eyes while shouting in anger:

“Sheesh. Seriously……How many times must I tell you for it to get into that brain of yours? THIS PLACE HAS BEEN BORROWED! I will be collecting the repair fees for the door and the hole in the wall from you guys!”

“Wa…Wait a moment, Jack-dono! That hole in the wall was caused by you, wasn’t it?!”

The members of [Perseus] desperately tried to counsel Jack on his decision. Though Kuro Usagi and Asuka were quite satisfied by that arrangement.

The leader of [Perseus] ―Laius― extricated himself from the wall of the workroom and he shouted back even though blood still flowed down from his mouth and nose.

“That hurts….Don’t joke around now, you country Bumpkin…!!! Try that one more time and I will smash your hollow head!!!”

“Hey, next time when you say those words, at least do your best to recall how many times you have been sent flying, will ya? Even if I use all the fingers on both hands, it wouldn’t be enough to count all those times you know……And mind you, I’m not some country Bumpkin. I’m warning you. If you say that one more time, I will make sure that your head split open like a melon.”

“Oh how scary~Bring it on then, you rotten country Bumpkin!”

“Who are you calling a rotten country Bumpkin, eh? You brat!”

“Please knock it off, Laius-sama! Jack-dono!”

The members of [Perseus] had frantically intervened to try cool them off. They no longer wear the armor for knights but were dressed like a normal blacksmith with a thick and heavy looking set of hand gloves.

Kuro Usagi and Asuka exchanged a quizzical glance before raising their hands suddenly to interrupt them:

“Mah, Mah. Please, you two should cool down.”

“That’s right. Jack, you needn’t degrade yourself to talk to such lowly individuals, it will only smear filth on your mouth.”

“Oi. Don’t you try act like some mediator and snub dirt on my nose on the sly! Come to think about it; why would a mere no name come to possess the Sacred Rare Iron and Diamond Iron Ore, which are metals of high spiritual powers? No matter how you look at it, it’s just a waste of such treasures! After all the one who landed Deen in that state must have been her right?!”

“You… You…… What did you say?!”

Asuka’s fighting spirit was kindled by his words for she didn’t expect for him to speak out the words that she had been conscious about.

Asuka, with her veins popping at her temples, stood at akimbo—

“Okay, I accept! I will take you up on the challenge!”

“Wa… Wait a moment, Asuka-san?!”

“Goody, Asuka-san accepted the battle! Make sure you beat him up until his head splits like watermelon!”

“Even…Jack-san as well?”

“WHaaaaaaaht? Mere no names want to take me up on a challenge?!! I think you are too confident with yourself here. You're just a shitty girl who’s stupid and old-

fashioned. The time has come for you to fall from that height to die a horrible death! You want a piece of me?! Then, let's get moving! I will show you how I make quick work out of the three of you at the same time!"

"Oi! Everyone knock it offffffff!!!!!!!!!!" The sounds of thunder roared together with Kuro Usagi's shout.

And the windows of the borrowed No.88 workroom were shattered by the violent lightning and the shockwaves that followed, causing the candle lights to crack into fragments from the secondary and tertiary waves similar to the aftershocks of a natural disaster.

Part 4

“Uu Uu……The [Vajra Replica] which had already been half destroyed is now completely destroyed.”

The rabbit ears of Kuro Usagi drooped and she hung her head low while sobbing.

The [Vajra Replica], which she had retrieved after the battle in [Underwood], had already been half destroyed due to its inability to handle the heat and charge released from its true form.

Kuro Usagi had released the Divinity given to it to use it as [Indra’s spear Vajra]. But the weapon had also been destroyed due to the inability to handle the sudden injection of power into it.

Feeling ashamed for having acted so immaturely, Jack lightly patted Kuro Usagi’s shoulder.

“I’m… I’m really sorry about that, Kuro Usagi-dono. Please cheer up. If time permits, please let me do the repairs for you.”

“Is…. Is that for real?”

“Yeah. I will even do it at a price negotiable by our relation as allies in the Alliance too♪”

Kuro Usagi’s face immediately brightened up at that as she started to sway her rabbit ears in joy.

But the duo behind her were still locked in a staring showdown and were in the midst of a hostile atmosphere. Though they were much more obedient after Kuro Usagi’s

forceful intervention, it seemed that there wasn't any letting up in their attitudes. Such an atmosphere wasn't conducive for the discussion to form an Alliance.

Asuka sighed as she scratched her hair while spitting her words in disgust: "…. This sure is unbelievable. Never did it cross my mind that [Perseus] would be the last Community to join the Alliance."

"Those are the words that you have taken from my mouth. Of all people to choose, we have to ally with those [No Name]'s? Hah, don't joke with me. Joining up with some robbers or hooligans would also be more constructive than this."

"Ararara. Then for [Perseus], that lost to the [No Name]'s, to the point of being badly beaten up ー and hence getting themselves ousted by [Thousand Eyes]ー to fall to the Six digits, what kind of HIGH CLASS COMMUNITY is it then?"

"Shut up! You smelly bitch……"

Sparks were flying between the two who held a strong sense of animosity against each other. Perhaps it was the thought of the pitiful state that the other had already fallen to, the first one to back off was actually Asuka.

Asuka gave a light sigh as she shifted her gaze to Kuro Usagi.

"Kuro Usagi, you have no objections?"

"Eh?"

"The target of our Alliance this time. The various rude acts and his previous attempt to auction off Leticia, aren't you the least bit bothered by that or even feeling angry?"

For an instant, Kuro Usagi was stumped by Asuka's words. She must be referring to the various humiliations heaped upon them in the past. If one were to look at all

those past incidences, it was definitely not possible for them to be allied under the same Alliance now.

But after giving it some thought, Kuro Usagi shifted her eyes towards Laius.

“Kuro Usagi also have an opinion about the Alliance candidate this time…… But you’ve said something that Kuro Usagi cannot ignore, so Kuro Usagi feels that we should not simply refuse it.”

Asuka also frowned, upon hearing that. Regarding that same line of thought, she was also quite concerned as well.

Laius had shouted loudly earlier about having repaired Deen himself……If that were to be true ―even if the Alliance arrangement were to break down― they would also want to listen a little more about that matter out of civility.

“Mah. Since Kuro Usagi says so, I will also drop it. But what was that about earlier? Was it really you who repaired Deen?”

“……Hmph. It’s only a simple task for me. We of [Perseus] have been bestowed the Gift of Divinity from one of the [Twelve Olympian Gods], [The God of Blacksmiths, Hephaestus] himself. Using the Gift allows us to work with ores that contain dormant spiritual powers. And that is our Community’s speciality.”

Laius gave a thin smile that was overflowing with pride. Though his attitude was really annoying, the weight of his words were of importance and couldn’t be dismissed as another nonsensical rubbish coming from his mouth.

Kuro Usagi folded her arms to mull over it for a while before giving a sigh after having come to an acceptance of reality.

"……the winged armor parts from the God of Commerce, the Helmet of Invisibility from Hades, bestowed with the Goddess shield that has the Gorgon's head attached to it and a Harpe that can kill the Gods—No, it should already be a Harpe that can kill Celestial beings right?……And since the shield had not made an appearance in the last Game we played, it must have been offered to the God of Blacksmiths, am I right?"

[The God of Blacksmiths, Hephaestus] is a Greek god amongst the Olympian Gods who have crafted many weapons and armors. He is a God who represents Fire and manufacturing.

He is also the God who crafted the [Thunderbolt of Zeus] and the [Tripod Automatons] amongst the many other accomplishments in the armory of the Gods. Being the one who supported the Greek mythologies as its backbone.

But Asuka, who stood beside Kuro Usagi, did not seem to catch on to the topic as she tilted her head to ask:

"Hm, what does that mean?"

"It's said that after [Perseus] defeated the Gorgon, he was bestowed the equipment that consisted of the [Helmet], [Plated boots], [Shield] and [Harpe]. But the [Shield] had been returned to the Goddess……It's said in the legends that the [Shield] had been fused together with the head of the Gorgon when it was returned. And that's where the shield of the constellation, [Perseus], resides and the truth behind the [Demon Lord Algol]. As for the one who could have bestowed the technique of fusing the shield and the head……it can only be the God of Blacksmiths right?"

Kuro Usagi recounted the [Perseus] heritage in a fluent manner while Laius started to smile smugly.

But Asuka continued to tilt her head quizzically.

"……?? Hm, which means to say that this young master is actually the descendant of a Great Hero?"

"YES! It's HIS ANCESTOR who is the Great person!"

"Yahoho! His ANCESTOR really is great!"

"Very well then~, follow me outside now! And make known all those filthy thoughts of yours once and for all! This time Algol and I……"

" " " What a despicable young master." " "

"ALGOLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLL!!!!!!!" "Please stop it, Laius-sama! Summoning a Celestial class being in the middle of the city isn't funny at all!" A few knights in their working attire had quickly pounced on Laius to pin him down.

Asuka used the opportunity to digest the information on the heritage of [Perseus].

"I get it now. So the Gift of Divinity from the God of Blacksmiths is also one of the rewards for defeating the Gorgon, right?"

"YES! But it's most probably not the Divinity itself and just of a Divine equipment that can strengthen the ability to bestow Gifts. And with that, it might just be possible to refine high level ores of the Rare Sacred Iron or Diamond Iron Ore class."

“Hmph, that sort of fact needn’t be said at all! As long as ore-sama here makes a move, such a small thing wouldn’t even need much strength……”

“Laius–sama, you can just drop the act already. If it weren’t for Jack-dono, we wouldn’t even know where to start working on those stuff.”

The male aide tried to persuade Laius.

And Laius rewarded him with an angry stare and a click of his tongue, without raising a hand at him.

Giving a sigh, upon envisioning the bumpy road ahead of them for their Alliance pact, Kuro Usagi suddenly remembered something and she turned to Jack:

“There’s something that Kuro Usagi’s been wondering about…… What’s the relationship between [Will-O'-Wisp] and [Perseus]? If I were to describe what I’ve seen, you guys don’t look to be on good terms.”

“Yahoho…… Mhm, it can be said as a relation of being indebted of sorts. I may have mentioned it before that we of [Will-O'-Wisp] had been attacked many times by [Demon Lord Maxwell].”

“YES. We’ve heard of that before. The feud between your Community and the Demon Lord of the upper Five Digits—”

“No, that’s already in the past.”

“Eh?” Kuro Usagi cocked her rabbit ears to the side as a gasp of surprise escaped her lips.

Jack continued in a nervous tone.

"That guy isn't at the Five Digits anymore. It's said that during the time that we have gone to [Underwood]—[Demon Lord Maxwell] has ascended to the Four Digits."

"Four… FOUR DIGITS?!"

Kuro Usagi shouted in dismay.

Beside her, Asuka had also narrowed her eyes as she took on a serious expression.

In Little Garden, the Seven and Six Digits would be called the lower levels while the five digits would make up the middle and from four digits and below, all those would make up the Upper echelon. Although the Five Digits were already counted as the middle levels, the power difference between them and the next level was a difference comparable to that of Heaven and Earth. And that was an accepted truth in this world. In other words, a Demon Lord of the top tiers in the Five Digits shouldn't be able to easily ascend into the Four Digits.

If it were to be the backing of a [Floor Master], which tend to be of the strongest race, it might still be understandable. But it is rare to see an individual ascend a level on his own.

Kuro Usagi cocked her rabbit ears to one side:

"Four…Digits? For an individual to rise to the Four Digits, it's already undeniably one of the strongest kind……but it would require a lot of merit for someone who isn't a [Floor Master] to ascend to the Four digits, wouldn't it? Or is it to say……"

—that he had become the important spiritual power that resulted in a [Paradigm Shift]? But Kuro Usagi had already stopped herself in mid-sentence for it would sound too absurd to be said aloud.

Although this was only a speculation at the moment, but the title of [Demon Lord Maxwell] had most likely been born out of the demon that was speculated to be present within the ideologies of Thermodynamics, which is a sub-topic of Physics ー[Maxwell Demon].

This imaginary Demon had been born after the year of 1860, which is also something that happened in the nineteenth century.

But according to the generally accepted knowledge of Little Garden's history, the prosperous age of [Paradigm Shift]s that allowed others to break into the upper levels have had happened before the seventeenth century.

And especially after the nineteenth century, the histories branching out from them, had started to split into many various possibilities and the possibilities had grown to the extent where it could no longer be controlled or recorded like before. Then came the twentieth century where the convergence and birth of Gods and Demons have had their boundaries blurred to the point of disappearing altogether. Even if there were records on it, it would only be at the scale of an urban legend. The [Paradigm Shift] that has bestowed Gifts and spiritual powers upon many had already been replaced by Beliefs in the Stronger Religions and that is the situation of the world today.

ーLet's use this as an example.

[Perseus] is a Knight recorded within the Greek mythologies, having had existed during the BC era. If the spiritual level of [Perseus] were to deteriorate, it might cause the influence of Greek mythology to be weakened in its impact on future

generations. And the worst case scenario would not exclude the possibility of being totally annihilated and forgotten.

However, due to the various influences of Greek mythology on Philosophy, Religion and Politics, it opened up many opportunities for them to have a large scale [Paradigm Shift] from their influence. Be it a true story or a story from the myths, they would still continue to appear in all the time-lines IN SOME FORM OR ANOTHER.

Hence those who are elevated to the status of Gods from the collective devotion of Humans will not be able to be killed by normal half-baked means. Since Gods are the milestones of the planet, the spiritual level and power of the individual would then retain the power to resurrect themselves according to the description of the generation that they came from.

And there's only two ways to kill Gods: to prepare the method to overthrow them in the history that they choose to propagate their followers—or to use a strike that has the destructive power to completely wipe out a large scale of Mankind's History.

If Celestial Beings were the strongest species that controlled over space and matter with their spiritual power,

Gods would be the strongest species that ruled over the ideologies and eras of their existence with their spiritual power.

(*However, there are also those such as <Journey to the west> that have written contributions propagating into the world outside of Little Garden. If one wanted to use the [Paradigm Shift] to obtain a huge amount of Spiritual power, the only way*

would be to grab a seat amongst the Gods. Black Death(Percher) was a very irregular example that wouldn't repeat itself as easily as before……)

"Kuro Usagi-san. I know what you are thinking about but that fellow isn't a normal Demon that can be predicted by means of common sense."

"What do you mean by that?" Kuro Usagi halted her train of thoughts as she cocked her rabbit ears to the side.

The flames in Jack's hollow eyes took on a melancholic glow then.

"Although it might sound unbelievable…. It's the truth that [Demon Lord Maxwell] seemed to have triggered a [Paradigm Shift] after the year of 2120AD."

"2…2120AD?" Kuro Usagi's rabbit ears had perked up in surprise at that information.

"Wa…Wait a moment! Kuro Usagi haven't heard of a convergent point at that time before! To have such a long history of being in the chronology of Mankind, it's already on par with the civilization that worship the Gods! To have that sort of Convergence point occurring in a Parallel world in that era is impossible! Even if it were to occur, it can only be in the next generation of Manki……"

"No, it's possible. I had thought the same at first and I had doubts before seeing his power with my own eyes……but after witnessing it for myself, I've already accepted it as a fact… That fellow is already on par with the Demon Lords of the strongest species."

A sense of restlessness could be picked up from the glow in Jack's pumpkin eye cavities and it did not seem to feel like a pretense at all.

Asuka who knew of Jack's strength first-hand had also contracted the nervousness as she gave a sigh.

"……Is that so? No wonder you guys have chosen to work alongside [Perseus]. Aside from the fact that he's an immature young master, it's undeniable that he possess the power to control a Celestial Being."

"Oi, who are you calling immature?"

"Yes, that's the case."

"At least deny that on my behalf!!! Aren't we part of the same Alliance?!"

Asuka and Jack exchanged a meaningful look and nodded their heads. While Laius seemed to have cried out a protest, they had just ignored him.

一[Perseus] was able to call upon the Celestial spirit of Algol.

Though she might have been defeated by Izayoi previously, her power is still one of the undeniably large existences. If one could borrow that sort of power, they would definitely be willing to set aside most of their discontent.

"……Well, I guess there's that to consider and I might give that some consideration during the formation of the Alliance."

"Is that true, Asuka san?"

"Mhm. But……"

In an instant, her eyes had lighted with anger once again.

"The prerequisite would be for the Leader of [Perseus] to apologize for all the rudeness shown to the [No Name]s previously."

"Ha…Haaah? Why do I have to do that sort of thing?!"

"Then let's end it as that. We will find another Community to ally with. Good. Bye!"

Asuka lifted her hand to wave her farewell and Laius's expression suddenly fell solemn.

Noticing his look, Asuka started to snigger confidently in her heart.

(*As I thought, there's a catch behind all this.*)

Considering the character of this man ー Laius ー he would definitely not agree to an Alliance without any conditions that benefited him.

In addition to the fact that [Demon Lord Maxwell] rose to the Four Digits, it should be more so then ever. Without a similarly high return for the high risk, he wouldn't have been willing to accept such an alliance.

And from how Asuka had seen it, the relationship between the two Communities seemed to be in a manner that Jack could lead Laius by the nose. And she guessed that [Perseus] must have been promised some great returns.

Grabbing hold of that point in mind, Asuka announced in a haughty attitude:

"Well then, what do you say? Regarding the rudeness towards [No Name]s……Okay, let's just start with you bowing your head to apologize to Kuro Usagi and Leticia."

Asuka gracefully flung back her hair as she taunted Laius. If he were the Laius she knew, he would definitely jump at that taunt in rage.

However, Laius displayed an unexpected amount of self-control as he replied in a voice quivering with restrained anger:

"……That's… That's okay. I will accept that condition."

"Ara, what a surprise. Looks like the Community might have fallen but you have matured a little as well. Then, what are you waiting for……"

"But I will also have a condition on my end!"

Facing Laius's challenge, Asuka straightened herself.

"Your tone seems a little forceful. Do you think you have the right to say those words?"

"Anyways, I would have to say this condition no matter what consequences there might be! If the benefits do not go both ways, there wouldn't be a point in having an Alliance! If I don't test out whether the [No Name]s have the strength required to join the alliance, how do you expect me to continue on with the talks?"

Laius stood up huffy as he pointed to Deen:

"Using the three types of weapons including Deen, obtain a victory in the <Duel of Creators>. If you cannot do that—These three weapons will be mine!"

Interlude

—Little Garden, Outer Gate number 2105380, The Plaza in front of the [Astral Gate].

The [Astral Gate] started to emit an amber light as the activating sequence was started up and the doors began to swing outwards.

This Gift that was bestowed to the Outer Gates is the one and only way for people to travel around the wide expanse of ground that made up the world of Little Garden. Hence it was an important Gift that required the protection of the respective [Region Master]s and [Floor Master] of the Outer Gate.

And Kouryuu, being the [Floor Master] Daihyo for the East Side, had to check the safety and workability of the [Astral Gate]s today.

Kouryuu, with the female shop assistant following behind him, had a look of weariness as he slouched his shoulders.

“We……We have finally reached the last Outer Gate to be inspected. Isn’t it a little too much to have a schedule of inspecting five thousand in a week?”

“Kouryuu-sama, what are you talking about now?! With Shiroyasha-sama’s act of stepping down from the position, all the ghosts and evil Rakshasas who have shown some self-restrain due to their fear have now started to be active once more! Don’t you remember that we have had to defeat numerous villains and demonic spirits in just this week alone—?!”

The female clerk started to launch into her preachings upon hearing Kouryuu's grumble. But her words were very true for many pressing matters began springing up everywhere after Kouryuu's assumption of office to serve as the Master.

A single band of thieves led by a fallen [Skand] who became a plague.

An [Evil spirit of Smallpox] haunting the rural Communities.

Last and not least there was also [Herpes Kamui] who started to attack after obtaining Divinity.

……Though the reason was unknown, they were all God class spirits of the 'God of Plague' classification. With exception to [Skand], the others were only of the level of folk myth Gods who were pretty much powerless. Their spiritual power could be described as a God of Nature of sorts after having leveled up their spiritual power from that of an evil spirit to a God-class. And that would have been no different from the level of Shirayuki-hime's spiritual power.

Although these were just a disorganized bunch of rebels that weren't enough to be a workout for Saurian Demon King, he who had always been addressed by the intimidating title of the [Great Sage who Devastate Seas], the continuous and relentless skirmishes would still drain him physically and mentally eventually.

Kouryuu scratched his head while giving a smile that seemed to have a hidden meaning:

"Anyways, let's end the inspections here for today. I intend to spend some time to drink tea at my leisure…"

"No, it's not done yet. Next would be the inspection on the reports of the individual allocations of toll collected from the [Astral Gate]s. If there's no problem with that,

please acknowledge that with a consent. And following that we also have the matter about the repairs on the shrine as well as the licensing of the ascension to the Six-digit for the Community in question. Then when all those are done, please begin the crafting of the trial suitable for the Level-Ascension Trial."

"Wait…Hold it for a moment! Aren't I scheduled to attend the Convention at the territory of Salamanders tomorrow?! How can there be time for all……"

"No problem. If you start at a galloping pace now, it will be fine. We can cut the time on breaks, sleep and meal times and it will be possible to finish it all by tomorrow morning."

"Oi—! How can you expect me to attend the Convention in that kind of state?!"

"You must be joking again. There's no grounds for you to discuss about a change in your 'showing up' at the Convention anymore. You will show up for the event even if you do not wish to."

The female clerk used her critical gaze to give him a one-over. In her eyes, Kouryuu was only the stand-in for her master and this sort of tardiness was damaging to the reputation of Shiroyasha.

"Moreover, Shiroyasha-sama has always completed this amount of workload without fail on a daily basis. If the new Master starts to neglect his duties just after the taking over of office, wouldn't that be damaging to the reputation of [Thousand Eyes]?"

Uu…… Kouryuu fell silent at that.

This was undeniably his greatest miscalculation.

Originally thinking that Shiroyasha was only engrossed in making merriment, he did not expect that she would be able to carry out her [Floor Master]'s daily task perfectly. And it was likely that Shiroyasha was able to play due to freeing up schedule after completing her daily tasks.

Finding nothing to say in his defense, Kouryuu could only give a weary sigh while looking up at the skies.

"……How capable can that fellow— Shiroyasha be?"

"At least much better than you. Anyways, you will get used to this schedule after your third month in office, so that would allow the workload to slowly increase during the course of the three months."

"It…It's still going to grow more than what we have now?!"

"Yes. It will be much more than the workload we have currently." The female clerk announced with a serious face.

And Kouryuu's shoulders drooped even further as he felt his strength draining out of him.

—Not long after that, the both of them were walking pass the Fountain Plaza to come out into the streets of the Free-use section of the region. The stale atmosphere of before had already been replaced by a lively one, having had its atmosphere livening up with activities once more.

After the appearance of a Community's revival, news of it had spread and quickly became a hot topic for everyone during their conversations over tea or even after mealtimes. The news of [No Name] defeating two Demon Lords had also reached

the neighboring regions as well for the plaza in front of the Outer Gate had now transformed into a stage for various merchants to host their Games.

The duo were taking large strides towards their Headquarters while looking around at the vibrant street that was all around them when a blonde servant girl appeared from around the opposite end of the street— Leticia.

The other had also seemed to have noticed Kouryuu as she gave a silent expression of respect with her gaze.

“Well, isn’t it the East Side’s [Floor Master] Daihyo-sama? It’s been quite some time since we met.”

“HoiHoi…this sort of formality should only be reserved for strangers. Treating me like that even though we are old friends and all, isn’t it a little too exaggerated? Just be normal about it, Leticia, there’s no need to stand on courtesy.”

“Fufu. Then I shall take that as an order from you—Long-time no see Kouryuu-aniki. I’ve always wanted to say hi to you but it seems that I’m still late to do so.”

“Pay it no mind. Compared to that, is my [Eye] still sitting on the pedestal?”

Kouryuu had a strange smile on his face while asking his question candidly.

And Leticia’s expression had darkened at that,

“……Sorry…About the [Eye] given to us by you, Kouryuu-aniki— the [Water Pearl] is no longer in our possession for it was taken away by the Demon Lord three years ago”, as she gave her apology gloomily.

That was something that happened before Izayoi and the others were summoned to the world of Little Garden. Originally, the pedestal for the water source used to hold

the water pearl that was manufactured from the [Dragon's Eye]. And the water source was none other than Kouryuu's eye at that time.

Kouryuu who had already expected that sort of answer did not show any anger in reaction to the news, but only gave a slight shrug of his shoulders.

"Nn. Just as I thought. Oh well, since it was stolen, there's nothing we can do either. And after all, it was something that I had given to Koumei and Canaria, so you needn't feel bad about it."

"Hearing you say that really put my mind at ease now. But it might be possible that it's in circulation in the market. If I do hear news of it, I will try my best to return it to you immediately."

"It's okay. There's no need for that. Even if you do return it, I'm already using another eye."

Kouryuu used his thumb to point at his eye patch while giving a shrug.

The surprising revelation caused Leticia to be astonished but she soon came back with a response:

"Then……There's already a new prosthetic eye in that socket?"

"No, it's actually due to another reason—"

"Kouryuu-sama, if we don't leave now, we will be out of time."

The female shop assistant interrupted Kouryuu's words and he quickly broke off the conversation to add his last question:

"Right! That lad—Izayoi and the other two lasses, are they still doing well?"

"Mhm, they should be very energetic today actually. After all they did go to the Convention destination early and they should be having a great time at [Kouen City] now."

Leticia replied while taking her leave to walk towards the [Astral Gate].

Kouryuu saw her figure off while his eye took on a serious look.

(*Is that so?……They are also going to the Convention huh?*)

He muttered to himself as he lifted his head to look up at the clear skies.

—The blood sample collected from Izayoi in [Underwood] had already been handed over to [Laplace Demon] and Kouryuu had asked for their help to analyze its components.

Although their activities as a Master had already ceased, they were still active in other activities. After all they were called the omniscient demon for a reason and he guessed that if anyone could check something from the blood, it would only be them. Hence his request to them for the results. And according to the reply from them, the finalization of the results would be given to him during the Convention.

If it turn out that Izayoi was similar to Sun WuKong, [Great Sage Equalling Heaven], who was a Half Celestial being—

"……Looks like I better get there a bit earlier."

"What?"

"Sorry to trouble you but please adjust the schedule a little to make it possible for me to rush to the Convention by today."

"Hah?" The female shop assistant gave a cry of surprise.

But she could see that Kouryuu was serious about it and she gave the schedule sheet a hard and long look.

"……Since it's something that is so important that it cannot be pushed away… I guess let's do it this way. As long as we bring out the ultimate technique, it will surely work."

"Really?"

"Mhm. Just that—"

The edge of the female shop assistant gave a slight curve upwards.

“—you will have to mentally prepare yourself to see some blood being spilt.”

“……”

The One-eyed Master’s eye was getting a little watery at the edges.

Suddenly feeling a bad premonition regarding the heavy work load ahead of him, Kouryuu made haste, back to the [Thousand Eyes] branch office.

Chapter 4

Part 1

—Little Garden, Outer Gate Number 54545's Stage Area, entrance to the Corridor displaying the [Tablet of the Sea of Stars].

"—Well then, Rin, what are you guys up to?"

"Wuai?"

Rin, who was sitting in the corner of the café, with her cheeks stuffed full with the Golden Yam Egg Tart had halted her hand that was holding another of those tarts when she heard that question. Seeing her face in that state, Percher who had wanted to approach the matter at hand seriously could only give a sigh instead.

Currently, Percher and Rin were on a different task that caused them to go on their separate ways from Jin and the others.

Jin, Sandra and His Highness had gone to the scene of the Corridor of Displays to conduct their investigations while Percher and Rin were to wait for orders at the entrance area.

But as they had much time to spare, they had decided to go for a bite, the famous local delicacy of [Salamandra]—the Golden Yam Egg tart. As she was still unclear on the motives of those two who didn't seem to be taking things seriously, Percher gathered her courage to assert her question once more:

"I've already seen through your reasons for coming to this City. So tell me. How long are you going to put up that act of yours?"

"Hoho, that really sounds interesting coming from you. Percher knows of our plan?"

Wow so scary~I'm so surprised! Rin had that sort of smile hanging on her lips.

The style of speaking after giving a staggered pause with an accented voice. That was the conversational skill of this young lady. Seeing how guarded her opponent was even though she had tried to shake her up, Percher decided to put on the pressure:

"Let me say this in advance. Everyone from [No Name] will be coming to this Corridor of Displays. As long as I meet up with one of them, the possibility of me escaping successfully will not be zero. The sneak attack that you are planning for the [Floor Master] will also end in a failure. Then, you guys will also be chased out of this place too you know?"

Percher gave a calm leisurely smile.

— Of course, all that she had said were only unsupported information fabricated just for the purpose of shaking up Rin even for a little. But little would Percher know that her lies would become a reality.

Rin made an act of pondering over it for a moment before smiling maliciously.

"Well then, if things really come to that point, we will just have to put an end to our plans there."

"Isn't it? Well, then why not stop n…."

"Mhm. I guess it's time to kill Percher-chan then."

—*Suu* A sharp dagger was already grazing Percher's neck.

Seeming to be an amazing control of strength, the tip only grazed a thin layer of skin that covered the pulsing artery.

The instantaneous drawing of the dagger that now pressed on her neck was so quick that it even caught Percher off guard even with all her heightened wariness from before. It was until the prick of pain started to register in her brain that Percher noticed the graze on her neck caused by Rin's dagger.

And that stunt caused Percher to stiffen up and turn pale.

Whereas, Rin only leisurely stowed away her killing intent that had been released instantaneously just a while earlier as she gave a mischievous laugh.

"Just playing with you there. I only wanted to play a prank on you a little. After all, Percher-chan isn't cut out for negotiations, so there's no need to push yourself. Moreover, if you really do have an information that is to be used as the trump card, you shouldn't be waving it around from the get-go. You should to wait for all the conditions to be set before bringing it out. If you just bring it out just like what you did moments ago, it wouldn't have much of an impact you know?……But, Mah, it's still a false report from you anyways."

"……Uu!!"

At this point, Percher's anxiety had finally come close to the critical point.

She had already made a mental preparation to create a chaotic situation with a battle if things made a turn for the worse, but it would seem that this was a really bad idea. Initially, she had had high opinion about the innocent looking girl's power, but little did she expect that her opponent's strength was one that exceeded her original expectations.

(*The difference is too great. Be it a use of melee or a tongue fight……*)

She had already entered a dead end and had no other moves to take. Even though it was the only chance she had when His Highness wasn't around, Percher was still unable to find the way out of this mess.

Noticing Percher's distress, Rin gave an unguarded smile as she shook her head.

"Really now. Just relax. At the very least, we do not intend to kill you, Percher, nor do we want to get rid of Sandra and Jin either. You could say that it would run contrary to our intent."

"……Contrary?"

Percher narrowed her eyes as she tilted her head in doubt.

Rin's gaze took on a serious look as she gave a giggle: "I for one, wish to get you three to become a valuable asset of our Community."

"wha……What?!"

Percher spluttered out her words due to her surprise. That must have been the most improbable possibility that she did not even bother considering about—the enemy's general and trusted aide wanting to recruit people from their side?

But Rin who misunderstood Percher's reaction immediately leaned close to a distance just three inches away from Percher's nose.

"No worries, we can discuss about the treatment and privileges! Percher-chan's loss can also be forgiven and written off. We will also be giving you the other Gifts of [The pied piper of Hameln]! The age of witch hunts had also been quite close to the era that Percher-chan came from. I think you might just be compatible with Orsola

you know~If you return the other half of [The Death Eye of Balor], we might even let you reappear as Black Death Demon Lord—”

“Wait, Hold it right there! Saying such things in a public place… Are you out of your mind?!”

Percher’s eyes kept darting around at the open-air café and the passers-by outside as she frantically covered Rin’s mouth. To be so bold as to speak of such things in the open, that was the really evil streak in this girl. Bur Rin continued to have that nonchalant look.

“There’s no problem at all you know? Because our voices, will not be able to reach the ears of others around us.”

“……I beg your pardon?”

“Try screaming at the top of your voice if you want. There’s no one who will be able to hear you.”

Using a very confident voice to announce such a scary thing. But that was something that Percher should have noticed from the start. If she had given it some thought, she would have known that such a thing would be possible with Rin’s Gift.

Regarding Rin’s Gift, Percher had heard of it a little—The mysterious Gift called [Achilles High] was conceptual type of Gift that controlled the spatial “distances” between objects.

And besides that piece of information, the conditions for its usage, effective range and real name for the Gift was unknown.

The only thing that could be confirmed was that it was truly a sort of ‘invincible’ Gift and Percher only knew of two existences that could defeat this sort of Gift.

As long as it is used to create a [Wall of Distance] between us and the other people around us, it would naturally create a soundproof condition that traps the sound waves from leaving. No, it isn’t only for that alone. It also prevents any escape or call for help.

(……*In other words, there wasn’t a possibility for me to create a ruckus that would draw in everyone into the chaos from the start?*)

That sort of consideration made that girl more horrifying.

In addition to that, the current [No Name]s did not have anyone who could force Rin into a corner and the only possibility would be to bet it all on that Izayoi to mess up the situation as much as possible.

What a pinch. She complaint in her heart.

“……Anyways, sorry about that. I don’t have any intention to join your group. Moreover, my master is Jin, so please convince him first.”

“Oh, is that so? If we get Jin, we can get a free Percher as well……That really sounds like a good bargain.”

Rin was mumbling to herself seeming like a girl deciding on the purchase of a candy that promised to have a free gift upon payment.

And though she might be displeased by that tone, Percher had chosen to be silent to avoid needless conversations.

"Well, let's put that matter aside for now for I would also like to confirm your thoughts on this. Percher, do you have any dissatisfaction about your current master and servant contract?"

"I can't say that I'm satisfied…… but it's still not at the point where I would want to terminate my end of the contract."

An answer that held no deception. That was undoubtedly the honest opinion of Percher.

The [No Name]s are a Community that have the potential to rise higher from amidst the lower levels for they possessed a variety of talents and a handful of elites who could fight on par with Demon Lords.

If they obtained the Alliance Flag, it might even be possible for them to rise up rapidly into the Five Digits as well.

But Rin narrowed her eyes to slits.

"……Is that so? But you do know that he doesn't possess the power required to help you, Percher, to achieve your dream right?"

"Uu…That……."

Rin's words rang so true that it seemed to have struck home into her heart. Although her childishness earlier had caused Percher to be confused and hence lowering her guard, Rin had not let that chance pass her by. And this girl had a sharp tongue that had the accuracy to hit its target every time in a clash of words.

The words embedded itself so deeply into Percher's heart that it gave off an illusion that the whole conversation had been staged just for that particular line to deal the finishing blow.

"……"

—To fulfill Percher's wish, the boy whose name is Jin Russel wasn't strong enough at the moment.

She had already known that for a fact.

No matter how extraordinary the comrades of [No Name] were, the most important person—Jin, the leader is still too immature. The problem that Rin had pointed out would not have been a problem if the wish were to be a normal one. But Percher's wish—-is one that would be a heavy burden of making enemies out of real gods.

If the secret wish that she harbored in her heart were to be leaked……it wouldn't be too surprising if Jin Russel were to cancel the contract or even seal Percher away for good. That sort of insecurity caused Percher to be unable to tell the [No Name]s of her yearning.

And it did not take much effort for Rin to see that insecurity in her.

Rin gave a charming smile as she crossed her arms before her chest.

"But it won't be that way for us. Although we may have been beaten in our own game by the Community of Jin and the others before, the battle this time will be a Game of a larger scale than before. And if everything proceeds as smoothly as planned……the world of Little Garden might just be totally thrown into chaos for real."

Resting her hand on her puffed up chest, she continued to look at Percher with confidence in her eyes.

That strong will in her gaze was really intense and seemed to shine in Percher's perspective. As one of the authoritative figures in an organization to have such a clear target in mind and the resolve and attitude to pull along her comrades in the chosen path, it really made Percher's loyalty waver.

"But……My ownership is still with Jin……"

"Isn't that simple? We just need to take Jin along with us and it's all solved right?"

"Wha……?!"

"I've discussed with Aura and Graiya Oji-san before and we feel that we still need another boy around the same age as His Highness to be paired as his friend. I would say that Jin's brains is quite good and he would fit perfectly to help our His Highness who lacks the knowledge of common sense in life skills. More importantly, we can also prepare many Demon Lords suitable for [Genier Contractor]—In the first place, his Gift will only be utilized to its truest potential when he comes to our side."

Rin added happily.

Jin's power was indeed a Gift that was indeed one that is specialized in the enhancement of sealed Demon Lords that are under his control. Leticia had also said that such a Gift was also quite renowned. Even in Little Garden where many Demigods and Gods roamed, it could be considered as one of the most unique Gifts.

Legend has it that [Genier Contractor] is a Gift that is conferred to [Solomon, The Spirit King] who sits in the Four Digits for having achieved the accomplishment of sealing seventy-two Demon Lords.

If he had defeated all those seventy-two Demon Lords by himself, that would make him run for second placing in the rankings for defeating Demon Lords.

And the ancestors of Jin Russel had cleared one of the trials prepared by [Solomon, The Spirit King]—the <ARABIAN NIGHTS> which had a part of the Gift as the prize.

Rin who knew of all that had also seen the true value of Jin Russel even if he was still developing in his Gift.

“The trials which were prepared by [Solomon, The Spirit King] has already been completed without leaving a single trial left undone. What’s left is only the defeating of the seventy-two demon lords which can be left to others to handle. And that makes Jin’s Gift incredibly desirable—even if some rough measures need to be taken, it might just be worth it.”

“……”

A sharp glint could be seen in those child-like eyes of hers but that sort of atmosphere had been dispersed almost immediately.

For Rin had suddenly stood up, preparing to leave the open air café.

“In any case, I guess that’s the end of today’s persuasion. Percher-chan also needs more time right? I will be taking my leave first, and I will leave His Highness to you today, Thanks.”

“Heys, wait…wait up!”

“Nay~I’m not gonna wait♪ But no worries. I will be back to sway you over to our side for I feel that it would be for the best for both parties. Ah~and don’t forget to

keep the real identity of His Highness a secret—this is also for the best for both of us.”

Rin gave a spin, causing her short skirt to flutter, as she turned to disappear into the crowd. While at the opposite end of the table in the open air café, a cup of unfinished drink was all that was left behind.

The girl who had appeared just like sudden storm had just left after having been satisfied by its destruction.

(*……to return to the Demon Lord Alliance?*)

Percher pressed her hand on her chest as she felt very uneasy about it.

She who is the representative of the eight million vengeful spirits—the collective of spirits killed by the plague of Black Death.

And this body had come into existence for the sole purpose of fulfilling the wish of those spirits who have died with much resentment in their hearts.

What should she decide on then?

The lonely girl who couldn’t find an answer to that question could only sit at her original spot.

(*I….what should I choose now…..?*)

Part 2

—[Kouen, City of Brilliant Flames], Commercial District of the North Side

Pinning his eyes on the guy with the “混”character on his back, Izayoi was happily immersed in the endless pursuit as he ran along the roofs of the buildings.

The afterimages of Izayoi could be seen flitting over the heads of the crowd as it shot off towards the alleys in the blink of an eye and easily outstripped the military police squads who were dispatched to secure the area.

Noticing the commotion overhead, the passers-by of the Commercial District were crying in surprise:

“Wuoooh?! What’s that just now?”

“It seemed like a figure of a human just flew over our heads!”

“There’re also the military police squads in pursuit. Could it be the rumored ‘Kamikakushi’?”

The strong wind that swept through the Commercial District caused the people to speculate on what they had just seen. For they could only see Izayoi even if they weren’t able to see the guy with the “混”character.

And though the military police squad had chased from behind, they were unable to lay a net to surround an unseen opponent, hence only resorting to chasing after the back of Izayoi.

(*If only Mandra, that fellow can widen the net of his men to surround the area, things would be much simpler……*)

But it was difficult for them to accomplish that when matched up with an invisible opponent. Moreover, the opponent's footwork wasn't worse than that of Izayoi's. After all the opponent was still a Demon Lord, albeit being a third rate one.

But even so, it was still possible for Izayoi to catch up to him if he gave his all into the pursuit.

However, if Izayoi were to put his full strength behind his every step, the residential structures that weren't stable enough would most likely be blown away. He had previously destroyed a tall building that way when he had used it as a foothold to exert his full strength.

Basically, all structures in Little Garden are built with a defensive Gift to reinforce its sturdiness but if Izayoi were to use his full power on them, it would be a different matter altogether.

(*Having said that, continuing this endless chase isn't going to solve things as well.*)

Initially enthusiastic about the chase, Izayoi had now sobered up completely.

He had thought that the game of tag would be complemented with the use of Gifts similar to the "虚度光阴". (Passing time in an idle manner. Direct translation for the skill that causes time to stop for the opponent) However, that kind of interesting stuff seemed to be limited to only that one time and the rest of the chase was purely a game of tag with him needing to hold back on his strength.

Looking from Izayoi's perspective of his dislike for repetitive labour, this sort of situation could only be described as really boring.

It did cross his mind to kick a building to shoot the fragments like the pellets of a shotgun……but he had used this trick on Kuro Usagi before and it wouldn't be interesting to use it the second time. Then, that would leave only 1 option left—

(*Oh well, I guess there's no other way around this. I will apologize to Mandra later.*)

Izayoi clapped his hands together as he gave his silent apology before injecting his strength to his legs while he continued to dash forward.

A full-power dash would have caused the buildings or streets that had been used as his foothold to collapse.

But if it were to be a full-power jump—The worst case that could happen would just be the destruction of a building.

Although that could still be counted as quite a severe damage, but if it were to be the price to catch the 'Kamikakushi', such a thing would be just a small sacrifice that the victims would surely be understanding regarding the damage.

On the other hand, Demon King of Confusion had not realized the dangerous thoughts that had formed within his opponent's mind as he sweated buckets while focusing on the run. He was busily flitting from the walls of the narrow alleys and making small hops on the tops of the trees. He would even dare to use the hanging lanterns and electrical wires as his footholds for his skills in making his body as light as a feather were as good as acrobats.

But being the one gifted with the array of versatile techniques, it was only him who understood clearly how bleak the situation was for himself due to the impossibly relentless pursuer who was unshakable from his tail.

(*Absurd, this is absurd! That smelly little brat is really absurd! If this continues, I can't even fathom the idea of meeting Kouryuu to challenge him to a duel!*)

Compared to the hatred towards his nemesis, it was much more important to keep his life intact. And the Demon King of Confusion continued to run with his cloak emblazoned with the"混"character billowing out from behind him.

He, who had come a long way to [Kouen City] for an opportunity to attack Saurian Demon King, [Great Sage who Devastates Seas], was carrying a tragic past as well.

—It would be interesting to know how many people actually remembers about it. For this Demon King of Confusion is one of the most courageous Demon Lords that were recorded within the <Journey to the West>. At the same time, he's also the first victim to be defeated after the Sun WuKong, who had accumulated a load of achievements in battles, for he had sounded the first gong of invasion.

(*Damn it……! I've only come to this sort of Human settlement just because of the news of that lad, Kouryuu, having taken the office of a Master…… Why am I so unfortunate?!*)

Pressing down on a connecting wire to a lamp, he used the force of its upward reaction force to jump.

Demon King of Confusion who twisted his body in mid-air, managed to capture the Izayoi's figure from the corner of his eye.

(*……I guess this leaves me with no choice. Although I didn't really want to use it before that lad, Kouryuu, arrives—*)

The atmosphere around Demon King of Confusion suddenly underwent a dramatic change. Izayoi clicked his tongue in frustration as he noticed it as well and berated himself for the miscalculation on his side.

As the spiritual power hidden away by the “混”character cloak started to expand, an ominous wind started to blow in the Commercial District.

(*[Authority of Host Master]……*)

The authority to forcefully issue a Trial that has been granted to the Strongest of Demigods, Deities and gods.

If it were just another normal day, Izayoi would have welcomed such a challenge but it wasn’t a good day for such a situation.

At this very moment, [Will-O'-Wisp] should be handing over the new Gifts to Asuka. If it were an actual Gift Game, things might be different but he did not want to risk an unnecessary battle with a Demon Lord without any sort of preparation.

And the ground started to give off *Kazha* sounds of strain as his feet ran upon the brick paved streets.

“I won’t let you…!”

Exceeding the speed of sound, he leap off with a force enough to vibrate the atmosphere around him.

The bricks beneath his legs had immediately shattered with pieces of rubble debris scattering everywhere.

At the very instant when his outstretched hand was about to snag the “混”character guy by his fingertips—Mandra shouted loudly from behind:

“Behind you! Watch out!”

He had only sensed the threat behind him only then but it was too late for him to react to it.

Izayoi had only just turned his head when he was struck—by an extremely cold gust of wind that swept into the extremely hot district.

(*What—-?!*)

The extremely cold violent gust that managed to freeze even the flames of the lamps had swept through the entire Commercial District. Using the rubble that had been swept upwards by the wind as his footholds, he managed to dodge the attack from his back.

But he was still slow by a beat.

It was as if the opponent had been waiting for Izayoi to make his second jump before perfectly executing the attack to be released all at once.

“……!!”

The cold bone-chilling winds were released at Izayoi while the debris from the structures nearby were also sharpened by the cold wind to form icy daggers that flew at him. Though Izayoi had used both hands to deflect all the icy shrapnel, he was still unable to dodge from the gust of icy-cold air that blasted at him.

The gust was so cold that it seemed to condense the atmosphere itself and cracks started to appear on his skin within moments of coming into contact with the extremely cold air.

Izayoi managed to right his posture in mid-air after being struck down by the extremely cold gust and he landed on the tarp covering a stall which reduced the impact of the fall. But his only miscalculation was the fact that the stall was one which sold fruits.

And Izayoi clicked his tongue in displeasure for he was soaked by the fruit juices.

“Darn….. I’m used to getting wet by water but it didn’t need to be fruit juice this time.”

Bite Izayoi sank his teeth into an apple.

And being chilled, it tasted quite good as well, but that ticked him off further.

The owner of the stall stared in a daze at Izayoi and his destroyed stall as a shout came from Mandra who had finally caught up.

“Hey, are you alright?”

“Ah, I’m fine. But I’m sorry for letting the target escape, and also for taking action on my own without calling for backup. Because I have no excuses for those actions.”

“No, no, it’s not something to worry about. It’s not like we can see him anyway and the result would have been the same……

Rather than that, where has that fellow gone? I still need information to give an update of the situation to the public.”

“I apologize for that too for I’ve really lost him completely.”

Izayoi answered awkwardly and Mandra didn’t berate him for that but only looked at the ground pondering over the bitter fruit that had been handed to him.

"……I see. But with things the way it is now, I will be insisting on your cooperation to solve the case even if you are unwilling."

"I don't see a problem with that. After all it isn't in my nature to leave things half-way. But the most important thing is that——"

Izayoi's words trailed off as he lifted his head to look at the skies.

Compared to Demon King of Confusion, he was more curious about that extremely cold wind.

To release the attack at the most opportune moment. That was a feat that not anyone could accomplish and it was a wonderfully executed attack that targeted the moment of vulnerability.

(*Was there an accomplice right from the start? I sure didn't sense another one then. Moreover if there were many people involved in the case, would that guy have flashed that card of [Authority of Host Master] that hastily?*)

Then who could that person be?

It wasn't the military police nor an accomplice of the Demon King of Confusion.

Could it be that an unknown third party had suddenly appeared to launch an attack at Izayoi? Or could it be just an act to save Demon King of Confusion?

And the biggest question is where could he, Demon King of Confusion, have disappeared to.

(*If I'm not mistaken, the presence of Demon King of Confusion had disappeared together with that gust of icy cold wind—*)

—that's right, he disappeared.

Although Izayoi had been struck by a stealth attack, Demon King of Confusion had already filled his field of sight and yet his target had suddenly disappeared like smoke dissipating in the wind.

Just like a real ‘Kamikakushi’.

“‘Kamikakushi’ has been ‘Kamikakushi’ed……? Looks like a problem has arisen even before the other can be solved.”

“What?”

“There’s a lot of things to do. But first we have to inform Sandra that the enemy is a Demon Lord of ‘Kamikakushi’ and I fear that only children can see him.”

Hearing Izayoi’s words, Mandra’s face had suddenly turned pale for some unknown reason and had drawn a sharp intake of breath.

“Only….Only children can see him?”

“Yep. The person’s name is Demon King of Confusion. His real identity should be a Demon or monster that can hide within the hearts of little children while roaming free—no, this stuff can be said in detail later. Your sister will be the best candidate to go up against this Demon Lord, so contact her right away.”

“I…I understand.”

Mandra replied through clenched teeth.

Izayoi picked up on the strange response and he cast a curious gaze at Mandra’s direction.

“……is something the matter? Is it inconvenient to do that?”

Mandra's face had taken on an expression of self-mockery as he muttered, "No, that's not it. I'm just feeling a little ashamed by my own actions." Izayoi's curiosity had been piqued by that strange expression but a member of the military police had frantically rushed over with a report just then and he could only swallow his question for now.

"Man…Mandra-sama! It's bad! According to reports, Sandra-sama has slipped out of the Palace!"

"What did you say?!"

"Luckily there's a lot of eye-witnesses in the city and she should be at the Corridor of Displays located before the [Tablet of the Sea of Stars]!"

"Tch! At this time? What is that girl thinking…."

Mandra wanted to say more but suddenly he held his tongue.

And that same bitter expression of earlier came over his face again as he turned his head to face Izayoi.

"I'm sorry but please accompany me for a trip to the [Tablet of Sea of Stars]."

"Okay. Mah, I've not seen enough of that Corridor of Displays yet, so with the offer of a free admission, of course I will be glad to leap on that chance."

The both of them nodded to each other and were just about to walk off towards the Corridor of Displays.

Just then, someone grabbed Izayoi. Wondering who could it be, Izayoi turned his head—only to see the fruit stall owner equally drenched in fruit juices smiling with his veins popping at the temples:

"……Okyaku-san, thank you for the cost of the repairs and the damages."

"……. Mandra-sama, the tactician, you have heard that didn't you?"

The businessman stared at Izayoi while Izayoi's face took on a mischievous smile as he stared at Mandra.

Being the leader of the military police squads and the tactician, Mandra had already guessed as much even before Izayoi said those words and he silently took out his coin pouch to place at the counter.

After that, Mandra left the place with an expression that was a hundred times more bitter than the one he originally wore.

Part 3

—[Ruby Cave], Underground Canal.

Plonk! Demon King of Confusion was deposited along with a hot wash of wind and he fell from his mid-air position.

“That hurts!”

He grabbed his head as he rolled around a few times. Due to the suddenness of the situation, he who had not be able to respond to the situation had landed on the ground. Head first.

To prevent the canal from being rocked by strong impacts, the stone carved canal was thoroughly inlaid with many Gifts. Of which some Gifts to eliminate trespassers had also been set up at certain points to trap and exterminate.

It could be said to be a fortunate thing in his misfortune for him to just hurt his head only.

“Why am I in the underground canal? Who is it who brought me to this place?”

Demon King of Confusion clutched his head as he took a look around him.

The underground canal that was as complex as an underground maze only had a few specific exits and wasn’t something that could be accessed from anywhere. Or at least there wasn’t an entrance from the streets of the Commercial District that would have led to this passageway.

Then, who could it be to have brought him to this place? If he could have figured out the answer just a few seconds earlier—the fate of Demon King of Confusion may have been slightly different then.

“Halt—!“

“!?”

The sharp voice was piercing and seemed to be of a high pressure as just hearing that word had already given him the illusion of being struck by an axe.

Due to the echoes in the underground passage, the source of the voice could not be pinpointed accurately but it could be sure that the person must be hiding in a blind spot of his field of vision.

Under the dim lighting, Demon King of Confusion had immediately stopped his movements. This is not because of him being unable to pinpoint the enemy’s location but it was his innate instincts of self-preservation that was shouting an alarm at him in the highest possible volume.

(*……This is bad…This is really bad. My senses are really too slow.*)

This Demon Lord who had been living in seclusion for a long time had now felt ashamed at his lacking that was being shown quite frequently today.

When he first found himself to be in this situation, he should have already noticed it.

The number of Gifts that could have brought him from the District that had no entrance to this passage would have been only a limited handful. For it would have been a Gift that enabled ‘passing through’—or a large scale Gift that could control the ‘Portals’.

(*Instantaneous transport of an object?……Though I’ve heard of it in the past, but this is my first time experiencing it for myself.*)

Demon King of Confusion was panicking as cold sweat started to dampen his back.

If he activated his Gift of “虚度光阴”, he might just be able to escape but he would have to aim for the time that the enemy drop their guard.

Since the order had been ‘Halt’, that would also mean that the instant that he make a move, the enemy would also bare their fangs.

Listening for the breath of his enemy, Demon King of Confusion then matched his heart beat to it while awaiting his chance.

Just when he was prepared to make his move—a crisp sound chimed from the depths of the darkness.

“Really now, Maxwell-san! Using threats will only cause others to mistake our intentions! We are here to make a deal, don't go scaring others that way!”

Hearing that young voice that really contrasted with the atmosphere then, Demon King of Confusion couldn’t help but fall to the ground.

But that was only understandable. He had already set his mind to activate his Gift in a gamble with his life on the line but only to be stopped short by the childish complains of a little girl who seemed to be trying to defuse the situation.

Losing his will to fight, Demon King of Confusion decided to ignore the command to look towards the one who just spoke up—at Rin’s direction.

“Oi Oi, don’t you think that this kind of treatment for negotiations is pushing things a little? Adhere to the request of your client next time, the intellectual Demon Lord of Thermodynamics, right?”

"……Hmph. When dealing with a third rate who only knows how to abduct children, that sort of treatment should already be very appropriate, am I right?"

The other had replied in a haughty and contemptuous tone and Demon King of Confusion was just about to return those insults a hundred fold when Rin frantically placed herself between them.

"An-ny-way-s! Maxwell-san, please redraw for now! You needn't mess up the situation for me every time!"

"Although I'm not really willing, but I will just comply with that. But if you are so angry, you will be violating the direction set by the Game controller you know?"

URIA! Rin shouted towards the dim waterway at the opposite end. And following that, the man who was at the end of the waterway……[Maxwell Demon Lord]'s presence had winked out of the place.

Rin gave a small sigh before turning to face Demon King of Confusion with a look of weariness on her face.

"Sorry about that. That fellow is definitely strong but the quality of his character is left wanting."

"HehHeh, that must be quite a headache. ……Well then ojou-chan, did you come to look for me knowing that I'm Demon King of Confusion and the situation I have?"

"Yes. My reason for coming here is to meet with the famous [Disaster of the North], Demon King of Confusion. If you can forgive that act of insolence earlier, I will be much blessed with that honor."

"……Oh?" Demon King of Confusion exhaled a long breath in admiration.

Though many people might have heard of his title as a Demon King, this other alias of [Disaster of the North] wasn't one that was commonly known. For that other name had only been told to those who had experienced the Trial hosted by himself.

"What a surprise. There shouldn't have been anyone who heard of that other name of mine and manage to survive……Oh well, forget it. What do you want me to do? I will just take it that I owe you one for just now and no matter how difficult a task you set for me, I will be willing to accept the request more favorably."

Demon King of Confusion gave a laugh under the folds of his long robes.

He had already guessed the organization that Rin belonged to for the warning issued by Shiroyasha when she stepped down from the post of [Floor Master] had spread like wild fire and even he who lived in recluse had heard of the news.

—[Maxwell Demon Lord] had joined the Demon Lord Alliance.

Then she who was addressed as the "commander"[Game Controller], could only come from one organization.

So Demon King of Confusion was full of anticipation when he asked provocatively:

"Well then ojou-chan, who do you wish to be 'Kamikakushi'ed? It must be your desire to snatch away a talented individual or two that you have searched for me right?" he spread his arms, causing his presence to be emphasized.

The game of tag earlier had only been a portion of his real power. Hosting a Trial that overrode the intellect of Mankind was the true epitome of a Demon Lord. And if one looked from that perspective, it would mean that he had not even shown a tenth of his true power yet. Hence, Demon King of Confusion was able to taunt Rin while boasting of his worth.

Rin placed a finger to her lips as she replied with an infinitely gleeful look on her face:

“—everything.”

“Wha?!”

“I said, I want everything.”

—For a moment, Demon King of Confusion had doubted his ears and returned the question reflexively.

But Rin paid it no mind as she stretched out her arms while swaying her beautiful black glossy hair as she spun around in a dance. And while she did that sort of cute girlish actions, she blinked those pretty eyes at him as she continued:

“That’s right, it is not a metaphor. Every single talented individual, materials, territory, social positions, Flags, Names and the Gifts that have been bestowed upon this piece of land. Take them away. Every single one of them. Not allowing even a single one of them to escape your hands, completely rob them of their wealth.—For that purpose, we needed your ‘Kamikakushi’, O Demon King of Confusion.”

Those were the words that she had declared with that chime-like awe-inspiring voice of hers.

It wasn’t a metaphor— Yes, they wanted to take away everything.

This was the place that the North, South and East Side Masters of were to gather in preparations against the Demon Lord Alliance but they had actually thought of this plan while knowing that fact. Seeming to mock their enemies in the face. And in the eyes of the one who said such blasphemous words—the girl called Rin had not a

shred of worry or a trace of fear about the possibility of the plan failing. There was only that blossoming look of joy that was on that cute smiling face of that girl who was feeling happy about the imminent plan of plunder that was about to be set into motion.

Hence Demon King of Confusion changed his view of her then.

Compared to himself, this girl had shown the truest essence of the term 'Demon Lord' of all the people that have been seen by him thus far.

"……Ha, Haha…….HehHehHehSiaHahahaha!!!!!! This is bad, bad, downright bad, a really bad karmic task you have there!!! In the age where even strong Demon Lords are to hide their names and aliases to survive, there's actually a little brat crazier than me, the crazy and hungry ghost, wandering the Earth?!!!! Looks like even after a thousand years, sin is still deeply rooted in this world……"

Demon King of Confusion laughed loudly while hugging his belly, laughing so hard that his tears flowed out as well..

And who knows whether those tears were for joy or due to his laughing.

But after his laughing fit had subsided, Demon King of Confusion panted as he got up to his feet with a gaze ablaze with the flames of his fighting spirit.

"—Okay. I will follow ojou-chan for that trip then. Take out your book for the Alliance recruitment and I, Demon King of Confusion will start right at this very moment to stand behind the Flag of the Demon Lord Alliance under this sky."

He had opened his blood red jaws as he laughed those words out.

Drawing out the Alliance recruitment book and a Flag, Rin was fairly satisfied by his devilish and fearless laughter. And under that Flag that started to flutter vigorously—she announced.

This was the Alliance Flag that had gathered many powerful Demon Lords under its pact and upon it was a ‘Tail biting Three Headed Serpent emblazoned on it of which its eyes emitted s strange light that seemed like the radiance of light bouncing off a king’s crown.

“I hereby welcome you, Demon King of Confusion. We of the [Ouroboros] welcome you into our ranks.”

Chapter 5

Part 1

—[Tablet of the Sea of Stars], Corridor of Displays.

Right at this moment, the Sun was already starting to sink slowly into the western horizon.

The appearance of [Kouen City] was gradually changing as it began to be dyed by the hues of dusk. Coupled with the colorful lights of the lanterns, it was only when night fell that this City would display its truest appearance.

There were many nocturnal races who took up residence in this City and the evening hours seem to be the time when it gets most lively.

The City that gave off a different radiance between that of its day and night—that is the territory of [Salamandra].

Just as the [Tablet of the Sea of Stars] had started to be dressed in the hues of dusk, there came a sudden commotion in the Corridor of Displays.

Upon receiving information on the whereabouts of Sandra, a large number of the military police squads had caught up with them. Ignoring the troubled looks that they have put onto the faces of the guests mulling around, they were hot on the tails of Sandra and the others as they ran around the place.

“Please wait up, Sandra-sama!”

“NO~! Before resolving the case of the ‘Kamikakushi’, I will not go back~!”

BLEH~ Sandra put out her tongue at them as she continued to run.

In actual fact, she didn't usually show this childish side of hers to her subordinates.

Jin who was also caught up in this commotion was being dragged around between Sandra and His Highness who had a grip on his collar as they ran around. And he was already falling into the state of suffocation.

Struggling for a long time to finally squeeze a space for his neck, he gave a pitiful cry.

"Hey….. I'm dying here!"

"No problem. If it's only suffocating to death, we can still think of ways to revive you later."

His Highness-dono had dropped the comment with a deadpan look. Was it due to this youth's responses thus far? For Jin was unable to figure out if the youth was being serious or joking about that comment at all.

……No, it's possible that this youth was just that serious all the time.

"Any….Anyways, we need to find a place to hide first!"

"Mhm. There's a back door leading into the showcased displays, which is usually used for the transportation of display items, just ahead of us, let's just rush inside there for now."

"Got it."

His Highness and Sandra continued to drag Jin as they sped along the corridors to take a sudden right turn and leap over the heads of the visitors. But it seems that the military police squads had already guessed this move of theirs and set up an ambush

before the back door. And they shouted the command as they spotted Sandra rounding the corner.

“Now! Let out the Winged Dragon squad!”

“Eh……Winged? Winged Dragon Squad? Right at the heart of the Corridor of Displays?”

Sandra couldn’t help but cry out in surprise, stopping short in her tracks as three Winged Fire Dragons of a height of approximately three meters towered over them while barring their way to the door.

The three dragons did not only possess the advantage of a pincer attack, having rounded them up in the middle, from front and back, they were also able to take flight and control the skies above. With such an ambush, they were no longer able to escape from the Corridor of Displays.

The three dragons who had fire rimming their jaws had surrounded the three of them and their leader stared at Sandra with a sharp gaze.

“Sandra-sama, please return to the Headquarters.”

“We have no intention of fighting our leader.”

“Please wait quietly for the convening of the Great Convention. If word of this problem were to spread, it will be the butt of all jokes amongst all the other Masters. So, for [Salamandra], please return to the palace quickly.”

Despite their polite use of tone, it did nothing to hide the dissatisfaction that was embedded within their words.

It's most likely that these three dragons were part of the group that did not support the move to put Sandra on the throne. Or else these inferior dragons wouldn't have appeared before them at this tourist attraction— the [Tablet of the Sea of Stars]. If Sandra wanted to use force to resist, these guys were most likely planning to push the blame of all the damages wrought on the gallery on her head.

So Jin drew Sandra protectively behind him as he suggested softly:

"……I say, Sandra, why didn't you ask Mandra-san to help you with this? Since the opponent is a Demon Lord, shouldn't [Salamandra] be going full force to deal with the threat?"

"……No, that won't work. Mandra Onii-sama did not believe me at all."

"EH?" Jin tilted his head as he couldn't imagine how that solemn and serious Mandra would put aside the words of his leader and he couldn't help but wonder if it was a mishearing on his part.

But Sandra clenched her fists while seeming to recall a past incident of hers.

"Actually……I've already seen the culprit for the 'Kamikakushi' at the scene of the latest committed crime scene."

"The culprit for the 'Kamikakushi'?"

"Mhm. It was a person wearing a long robe that had the character of "混" emblazoned on the back. But it was only I who could spot the 'Kamikakushi'…… Mandra Onii-sama and my comrades had not believed my words then. From that day on, onii-sama had called me to stay out of this business."

Sandra closed her eyes as she recounted mournfully.

But she immediately shook her head to straighten up her thoughts.

“Mandra Onii-sama has always been like this. He had never taken my words seriously before. If the relation between the leader and the tactician was already like this, how else can I continue to lead the Community? That’s why I need to use this incident to get the trust of onii-sama and the others.”

Sandra clasped her hands together as she struck up the blaze of fighting spirit within herself once more.

Hearing her words, Jin finally understood the reason behind this stealthy plan of hers to sneak out.

Sandra’s character had always been one that was bold and unrestrained, but that did not make her a crazy girl who would do things on a whim. And the reason for Sandra to steel her heart enough to undertake such action was more of the fault of her pride than a rebellious act against her elder brother.

As a leader of the Community, whether one was able to gain the trust of their comrades was a matter that concerned its survivability. Needless to say, with [Salamandra] being such a big Organization, as long as the subordinates started to harbor a little doubt, it would definitely create much problems within the chain of command. And for a Community that had always passed the position of the leadership by the heir of the lineage, this was an obstacle that she would have to overcome sooner or later.

“I understand. Since you’ve said so, I won’t push further. But, how do you intend to break out of this current situation?”

"By force……or should I say that was my original plan. But it would be troublesome if the displays in the gallery were to be destroyed. There's a passage that leads to the arena located above the backdoor entrance of the Gallery and we need to find a way to get there."

"Come to think about it, it's almost time for the [Duel of Creators] to begin. There should be quite a large flow of visitors flocking to the arena."

After the flag off of the Game event, the visitors from the Corridor of Displays would most likely swarm into the arena spectator area and provide an excellent cover for them. But how were they going to make it to that place seemed to be the greatest problem at the moment.

Staring at the three Fire dragons who were closing in on them, Jin kept thinking hard for a solution.

Just then, His Highness broke in:

"Jin, Sandra, is there only one condition?"

"Huh?"

"The condition of breaking out. After all, I'm employed by you so this sort of small matters can be left to me to handle."

"Small…Small matters……once we start a brawl, the whole plaza for the displays will be thrown into confusion with the military police squads. If there's a method to break out of this encirclement without hurting the opponent, it would be good, but other methods would definitely cause a huge problem."

“Is that so? So, you mean that as long as the military police squads are kicked aside but not hurting them would be fine by you right? That will be a simple task.”

His Highness had merely stated it without the intention of boasting.

Seeing his confidence, Jin and Sandra looked at each other, stumped for words. And just to make it clear in advance to prevent any misunderstanding, Sandra also possess the power to defeat the Winged Dragons and the military police squad.

But to take on those military police squads without harming them or the displays in the gallery, that really raised the difficulty up by a few notches.

“Nn. About that……I will confirm about the plan again. No destroying the Corridor of Displays, kick the Winged Fire Dragons and the military police squads away and find the ‘Kamikakushi’. Those are the things that we must accomplish……”

“Mhm, yes. Do not destroy the Corridor of Displays, send the Winged Fire Dragons and military police squads sailing through the air and search for the ‘Kamikashushi’ at the same time, am I right?……Well then, is there any other requests?”

*Kacha Kacha*His Highness started to crack his fingers as the three fires dragons were almost reaching them, albeit slowly.

Even though His Highness had asked to confirm the final points, the two of them had already ran out of other ideas.

Sandra nodded her head as she steeled her resolve then.

“Well then, I will be leaving it to you. I will snag the winged Dragon who is in the sky while you needn’t hold back on the other two winged dragons. Try your best not to harm the military police squad as much as—-”

—possible and just run them off the grounds. The last part had not made it out in time.

For a Winged Dragon that was awash with waves of heat had pounced on her from behind, taking the opportunity to restrain her while she was focused on talking.

“Sandra-sama, forgive my insolence!!”

The ten feet tall huge body had dipped quickly and drew close to Sandra from behind. Sandra who was issuing the instruction to His Highness had then lagged for a moment in her reaction and was snagged by the front claws of the Winged Dragon.

“Ahyo~……?!”

“Sandra!”

“Sandra-sama’s safety has been secured! It’s okay to make the other two suffer a little! Everybody, charge!”

The military police squads and the other two Winged Dragons gave off a belligerent roar and an enthusiastic response to the command.

His Highness quickly grabbed Jin by the scruff and drew him close to whisper in his hear:

“It will be over soon, just stay down for five seconds.”

“Five……”

At that instant, there was a sudden explosion from the ground beneath the spot that His Highness originally stood at as he lunged towards the military police squads.

The military police squads hadn't been expecting their target to be captured to take the initiative to charge at them and they had faltered for a moment. This chance, however, was not let off by His Highness.

Swinging his arms lightly, he smacked right into the midst of the seven people formation to deliver accurate and critical punches on the vital spots to rob the military policemen of their consciousness

And there were a total of fifty-five others from the military police squad at the back. To actually make such a huge fuzz over an ojou-chan? His Highness couldn't help sighing in his heart as he continued to sweep through the military police squads in a flurry of punches.

Using an astounding super speed, His Highness accurately connected his punches to his opponents' chests that were right over their hearts, their necks, the shafts covering their brain, etcetera. It was only when the last one of them was knocked unconscious and crumpling to the ground that Jin finally managed to react.

"……A second…..Not even a second. Your Highness……you……!"

"Bastard! That smelly little brat dares to look down on us!"

"The crime of hurting us, comrades, don't you think of getting away lightly with this!!"

The two Winged Dragons roared ferociously as they made their angry charge towards the one who seemed to have ruffled their scales the wrong way.

The Winged Dragons who had waves of heat emitting from their jaws were flying with that huge body at an unbelievable speed and they spat an enormous fiery ball of fire from their mouths.

The fire ball exceeded the height of His Highness by almost three times but His Highness seemed unfazed as he merely waved his right arm lightly to make the fire ball disappear without a trace.

“That’s…That’s impossible!”

“The command received was to show no mercy to you guys. So, I will not be going easy on you……Well, if you want to run, now is the time, you know?”

The warning was given out of his generosity but those two Winged Dragons had mistaken it for a taunt as they grew angrier as they roared:

“Hah! Who’s afraid of you huh?! Our scale mails have been forged in the huge crater of the peak yonder, it will never lose to the likes of you, a kid who’s green behind the ears!”

Spreading its wings, the Winged Dragon gave it’s declaration to accept the challenge for the confrontation.

Up till now, His Highness who had only dully knocked his opponents over had widened his eyes in surprise—the next moment saw a cruel smile creeping across his face.

“……Is that so? Since that’s the case, I will be in the wrong for having any mercy then……!!!”

“Ah! Your Highness, DON’T!!”

Sandra who was still in the grasp of a Winged Dragon hovering in the skies had shouted loudly in fear for her comrade’s safety.

But it is a pity that it was late. This shout to stop had come too late.

Although his battle stance had been casual, His Highness wasn't that generous to give his opponent any leeway after being goaded in that fashion. The usual calm demeanor of his had completely vanished to be replaced by a battle frenzy that cloaked his body.

The short lad, who was now leaking a little of his spiritual powers, gave off an illusionary feeling of being many a dozen times larger than his actual size. From the pressure that was given off from the golden irises of his, the white haired lad would have been comparable to that of a Demon Lord.

Stepping on the ground with enough force to create depressions on the floor of the corridor, His Highness seemed to travel at an acceleration that would burn the atmosphere itself—the Third Cosmic Velocity as he barreled straight into the chest of the Winged Dragons.

"Wha……?!"

"Take this with all you've got. Don't worry. If you are lucky, you might just survive—!"

The fist of the lad connected with the Winged Dragon.

The impact of the punch from what looked like a scrawny short lad had packed a punch that exceeded the imaginations of the Winged Dragon. The scales that were harder than steel were shattered beautifully and the huge body was thrown back. And the other Winged Dragon used his four limbs as a meat shield to receive his comrade.

"Gu, ohohohohohohoh!"

The other Winged Dragon gave a roar as he tried to stop his comrade's fall.

But the Winged Dragon that was thrown back by His Highness's punch continued to accelerate in the same direction without slowing down and the two Winged Dragons were knocked out of the Corridor of Display's plaza.

Jin, Sandra and the sole remaining Winged Dragon stared at the whole series of events that played out before them with wide eyed surprise.

And it was the nonchalant voice of His Highness that drew them back to the present.

"Oi, that fellow who's still holding on to Sandra. Release her now."

"What?!……Who do you think you are?!"

"Come on now, just release her already. Sandra's trying to earn the trust of [Salamandra] in this desperate struggle. Being one of the main fighting force of the Community, just try to have a little more confidence in the decisions of your new leader alright?"

His Highness lifted a brow as he chided the Winged Dragon.

Being lectured by a youth, the pride of the Winged Dragon was wounded. However, the Winged Dragon had a complicated look on its face as it looked around at Sandra, Jin and His Highness, and his comrades of [Salamandra] who were on the ground.

After sweeping them with a bitter gaze, the Winged Dragon silently released Sandra from its grasp.

Sending Sandra back to the Corridor of Displays, the Winged Dragon bowed in a high-kneel while saying respectfully.

"……please forgive our insolence, but we too were thinking of the future of [Salamandra]. Please do not push yourself and return if you deem it too dangerous to handle alone."

"Okay, I got that. I'll also give it some self-reflection for my embarrassing immaturity for resorting to this sort of violent method to convince you guys. I hope that my actions this time will help to bring glory to the Flag of the Fire Dragon, and in so doing, I would hope that you guys will forgive me."

The Winged Dragon and the young leader met gazes and nodded.

Spreading his wings, the Winged Dragon gave another last glance at His Highness before departing.

As the commotion finally came to a close, Jin let out a long sigh before giving a smile in relief.

"With this, we only need to escape into the arena right?"

"Mhm. …… But it sure gave me quite a shock to see that His Highness is actually that strong."

"Is that so? I think I'm more in awe with that fellow of the Winged Dragon squad. Even though I did hold back, but that impact was supposed to be a punch that would send them to the end of the world. I really didn't expect for them to be able to stand so quickly"

"Is……is that so?"

"Yeah. If there were four thousand Winged Dragons of that standard, it would really be quite a difficult situation for me to handle."

“—-That’s just like you are planning to do battle against [Salamandra], huh?” Jin gave a laugh.

His Highness laughed in reply as well.

“Aw, cut that out. Haven’t I said it before? My Community is a commerce type and picking a fight with a [Floor Master] would definitely cause our business to be sorely affected……Compared to that, let’s go into the arena first. Is the back door that way?”

The trio nodded silently as they met gazes and started up the stairs that would lead to the back door of the gallery with the link way leading to the arena being the destination in mind. And it would seem that all the military police were still outside as there wasn’t any of their presences felt close by.

Temporarily sitting in the linkway, the enthusiastic cheer of the crowd sounded from the arena.

And in response, the lady responsible for being the emcee of the event gave a lively announcement.

Jin cautiously looked around as he pulled open the door to walk into the arena stands—

“—Round one will start now!

From [No Name], Kudou Asuka!

From [No Name], Kasukabe Yō!

And the idol of everyone! The most popular candidate for obtaining the overall victory!

The Super lady who is unbeatable!

From [Will-O'-Wisp], Willa the Ignis Fatuus—!”

Chapter 6

Part1

—On the stage of the arena hosting the [Duel of Creators].

<<Gift Game: Duel of Creators>>

Participating Communities:

****A total of twenty-four participants. ※Listed in the attachment.**

Summary of the Game:

***The preliminary rounds will be a battle amongst three participants.**

***The last man standing will proceed to the next round.**

Winning conditions:

***When your opponents have fallen outside the arena grounds.**

***When you destroy your opponent's Gifts**

***When your opponent has not fulfilled the winning conditions (includes surrendering)**

Conditions for disqualification:

***When the participant falls outside the arena grounds.**

***When the Gift possessed by the Participant is destroyed.**

***When the participant has not fulfilled the above stated winning conditions.**

Oath: Respecting the above stated content, based on our Glory and Flag, we shall host the Gift Game.

"Salamandra" Stamp

The rays of the setting sun and the glow of the chandelier splashed across the arena.

Due to the Convention of the Masters that would be hosted soon after, it has led to an unprecedented increase in the turn out for the [Duel of Creators] that is hosted monthly, and it was much livelier than usual.

The three contestants stood at the three corners of the arena as they awaited the gong that signaled the start to the game.

Kudou Asuka stood at the western edge of the combatant field while surveying her opponents with a sour expression.

(*Never did I think that the day that I would face Kasukabe-san as my opponent in a Gift game would come……On the other hand, Willa the Ignis Fatuus, could it be……*)

That girl over there, the leader of [Will-O'-Wisp].

Asuka could feel a devilish charm exuded from the contrasting luscious and cute characteristics of that girl. Her appearance was the epitome of immorality for it stole and fastened the gazes of Men with that seductiveness. Yet, it was clear that this girl was not aware about her charm; with those twin tails which were as smooth as the finest dessert that melts in the mouth to highlight her baby face. Whereas her curvaceous breasts and figure would cause others to cast their lustful looks in her direction for they were helplessly drawn towards it.

Asuka was looking at her and Willa who had noticed the gaze, turned to look at her.

"……?"

She gave a delightfully sweet movement of lightly tilting her head to the side. Most probably not understanding the reason for being the focus of Asuka's gaze. Her every move was adorable and at the same time, it was infinitely ravishing.

—But Asuka was clear about a fact.

That gorgeous looking girl is the demon who commands the Jack o' Lantern.

—and also one of the few participants, countable by the fingers of a hand, who represents the North Side.

"……"

As they met each other's gaze, Willa suddenly drew out a cross shaped blunt weapon.

Zugashu!

"!!?"

A sudden welling of a throbbing pain came from Asuka's forehead and struggling in the midst of all the stars that seem to hover in her sight. Hurriedly, she tried to assess her situation by looking around herself, only to find the cross-shaped blunt weapon that was supposed to be in Willa's hand—No, to be precise, the hammer was over here at this very moment.

Incensed by the initiated attack that started before the official commencement of the Game, Asuka sprung up from her seat but Ayesha hurriedly stopped her.

"No, please wait, sorry about that! That's Willa one-san's bad habit……"

"A bad habit? Throwing blunt weapons on the heads of others?!"

"Ye, Yea! Throwing blunt weapons on the opponents whom she have taken an interest, to see the response of the target, that's her bad habit! I will give her a stern warning about it, so please look over this matter for once!"

Ayesha scrambled to hold down Asuka by her shoulders. Although Asuka didn't want to swallow her anger, for now, she decided that it was best to swallow it down.

After all this was the Game Stage and any debts owed can be compensated for in the Game soon enough.

(*That's just how I would want it! I will not let you run after biting me like this, O' strongest contestant of the North!!*)

Asuka who was surprised by the blow earlier had now set her determination.

She looked at the new Gifts and comrade who resided in her Gift Card at the moment while feeling her anticipation bubble with excitement.

"I believe in you guys, Deen. And—Almathea."

{"Don't worry, be rest assured, my master"}

Part 2

—South Entrance of the [Duel of Creators]'s arena.

Kasukabe Yō was quietly focusing her thoughts in the South corner.

She did not know why Asuka would want to join the Game.

But she did know that there's now a reason for herself to win in this game of [Duel of Creators].

Yō gave a sidelong glance at Willa the Ignis Fatuus of the East Side while recalling the conversation they had earlier.

"Great. With this, I can complete the promise I've made to Koumei."

It is still doubtful as to whether that girl knows anything about her father but from that sort of tone, it would seem like she had known him. If that is so, it didn't matter which opponent standing in her way. Yō must obtain victory.

Moreover, Kudou Asuka is her friend. She cannot allow herself to lose in a humiliating manner in the battle.

(*Kuro Usagi and Jack are also in the spectator stands. I guess that would mean that Asuka have already received her new Gifts. So, I must make the result apparent in an instant before she can even get the chance to use them.*)

Yō gave a smile as the feelings of her strong fighting spirit, confidence, and expectations towards her comrade swelled in her chest. If Asuka could defend against the first strike, that would prove that Asuka has overcome her weakness from before.

As a friend, that would give the feelings of joy, dependability, a little threatening and amusement.

(*Moreover, just now…she…I've already figured out the Gift of Willa-san and have a good counter for it ……No problem. I won't lose.*)

Yō held onto her absolute confidence and strategies.

Just as she heightened her concentration to the highest, the sound of the gong signaling the start of the Games reverberated within the arena.

Part 3

Kuro Usagi, Jack and Laius sat at the spectator stands where the voices of the crowd were rising to a crescendo. And the trio awaited the start of the Games.

“Uu……This…This is bad! Who would have thought that Asuka-san, Yō-san and Willa-san to be pitted together in the same preliminary round?!”

“Yahoho……likewise. That girl who does as she pleases, I’ve already told her many times to come straight to the workshops. But there shouldn’t be any problem for Asuka-chan!”

“Bu…But, Yō-san’s physical abilities are exactly the counter to Asuka-san. Once she falls out of the field……this game might even have a victor emerging in an instant.”

“Impossible.”

Jack sharply interjected and Kuro Usagi could only shut her mouth at that.

Jack had clearly seen the growth of Yō’s power in [Underwood] for himself and yet his voice contained such confidence and assurance.

“Yahoho……Kasukabe-chan is indeed a strong enemy but it is still possible for Asuka-chan to beat her. After all, Asuka-san has yet to comprehend her true abilities…. Though saying that, I’ve only understood from listening to Garol-dono’s explanations. But after listening to it would make one understand that her power isn’t about controlling the gifts bestowed to her but belongs to the faction that bestows it —similar to the bestowing of [Mock Divinity].”

“YES.” Kuro Usagi nodded her head in assent, she had also had a feeling of that.

In Little Garden, the thing called [Divinity] referred to the Gift that could cause a race or object to have its spiritual powers increased to the maximum. Among these there exist something called [Mock Divinity] that specialized in pushing Gifts to its maximum potential causing them to release power that was of a similar level to those of the Divine-classed Gifts.

But, as it only raises the output, there would be a possibility that it would destroy the Gift, after it has been pushed to its fullest, due to its inability to withstand the proportion of the spiritual enhancement.

“It’s a terrifying ability and also very difficult to be handled. Especially that the method of bestowing happens to be that of ‘Conferring Divinity(language)’. Language being the medium by which spiritual power is dissipated instantaneously and it has the characteristic of deteriorating before reaching the intended target, not to forget that we have to factor in the spiritual power of the target that might be able to resist the influence. Hence Kuro Usagi-dono, mistaking her power as [Control] is quite understandable.”

“YES…… but thinking about it, no one should normaly think of it as the conferring of mock divinity from the start.”

Kuro Usagi’s ears quivered indignantly in protest.

Jack suppressed a wry smile as he extended his index finger.

“That’s why we have prepared the most suitable equipment for Kudou Asuka……the Gift that can bring out that absurd potential in her—For now I can even safely assert that Asuka-chan is on par with the power level of Faceless.”

Jack said with confidence.

Seeing how he was so sure about that, Kuro Usagi could only hope for that to be true.

And swallowed hard as she took in the sight of the circular battle grounds.

“On par with—Faceless-sama?”

“Yahoho! Haven’t I said that? Asuka-chan might just win—”

“Impossible. The champion can only be Willa.”

The cold voice from the side had broken into their conversation.

Laius who sat beside Jack had mercilessly trampled on their hopes.

“Willa’s the strongest of the North Side. Just a mere no name can’t hold a flame to her. But if the person in question possesses the ‘Fortress’ that I’ve created, perhaps she might last up to five minutes or so.”

Laius’s words interjected into the duo’s casual conversation.

Jack gave a sigh, seeming to have lost some of his momentum in his upbeat voice:

“Haiz…… Looks like you really wish for Asuka-chan to lose eh? But that’s a weapon that can only be used to its utmost potential in the hands of Asuka-chan. Laius-kun, you know that more than anyone else right?”

“Hmph, so what? I don’t really care about that sort of thing. I only want that girl to be humiliated. And the materials for ‘Fortress’ is the Adamantium Ore and that fleece. Separating them into the refined metal and fleece to be marketed would still be quite lucrative won’t it?”

Laius gave a thin and annoying smile.

Kuro Usagi furrowed her brows at that, but the thing that she was concerned about for another matter.

(*The ‘Fortress’ must be the new Gift right? But what could those items, the Adamantium Ore and fleece be about?*)

“I say, Laius-kun, that fleece was borrowed from the [No Name]s and you cannot just sell it off just on a whim of yours. Moreover even if you want to sell them, there’s not much use for them—”

“Haha, you sure are a toothless bumpkin for not knowing about this. That piece of mountain goat pelt is actually one of the most exquisite items that can be used to aid agricultural Communities. It’s so important that they will even salivate at the sight of it.”

“Agri, Agriculture? Fleece of a mountain goat?”

Wasn’t that Gift called a [Fortress]? Unable to figure out the connections between them, Kuro Usagi tilted her head in confusion.

Indeed, they had taken some of the suitable Gifts from the treasury of the [No Name] to be used for the creation of Gifts, but Kuro Usagi had not heard of their practical uses.

But since it was a Gift that was wanted for agriculture, it must be something beneficial to the rebuilding of the farms.

Lily and the other children would be very happy to hear this. It could be that Jack might have planned for that to have prepared such a Gift.

“……Ah! It’s starting!”

Kuro Usagi pointed at the centre of the battlefield.

As the sound of the gong to flag off the start of the Game reverberated through the air, the gazes of the spectators were all focused towards the circular playing field.

And shouts of anticipation coursed through the spectator stands.

After the three strikes of the gong to signal the start of the event, the girl who took on the role of Judge—Ayesha Ignis Fatuus, appeared at the centre of the playing field with her blue twin tails swaying behind her.

“Ay….Ayesha-san? Why is she the judge?”

“Yahoho! We of [Will-O'-Wisp] have been in this Game as a regular! So, Sandra-sama has nominated Ayesha for the job in recognition of our long participation!”

Jack bobbled his pumpkin head as he gave a proud laugh.

His Community was already erected in the revered section of the [Tablet of the Sea of Stars].

And the reason for Willa being named the strongest Player of the North was precisely due to her countless records of championing the Game, becoming the invincible legend.

Choosing the judge from the Community of [Will-O'-Wisp] that had performed well in the Birth of the Fire Dragon Festival was also something that shouldn’t be much of a surprise.

(*It’s finally starting. Yō-san……Asuka-san……*)

Kuro Usagi intertwined her fingers seemingly in a prayer.

Standing upon the stage of the battle field, Ayesha began to read out the names of the three contestants who were waiting at their respective corners.

“—Round one will start now!

From [No Name], Kudou Asuka!

From [No Name], Kasukabe Yō!

And the idol of everyone! The most popular candidate for obtaining the overall victory!

The Super lady who is unbeatable!

From [Will-O'-Wisp], Willa the Ignis Fatuus—!”

“Wooooooooooooooooooooooh!” Hearing the introduction made for Willa, the entire stands erupted into wild and feverish cheers.

Although she wasn’t as approachable as Kuro Usagi, but Willa still had quite a sizable popularity. But the person in question had tilted her head in puzzlement over such an uproar in the stands.

Seeing the frenzy of the crowd, Ayesha had nodded her head in satisfaction as she raised her right hand to make the announcement.

“I hereby declare—- the official start of [Duel of Creators]!!!”

Part 4

In an instant—

An azure glowing wind was whipped up from the ground.

Kasukabe Yō who had rapidly entered her battle state had immediately assessed the phenomenon to be the wind released by Willa.

Her spirit name being the [Demon of Azure Flames] was partially due to the ability to call out flammable phosphorus gas from fossils. If it were that only, Yō only needed to whip up a whirlwind to dodge it.

But to be famed as the strongest flames of the North, it should not be only at the level of a natural phenomenon.

"—Summon, [Ignis Fatuus]."

"……!?"

A wave of heat was carried within those azure blue winds and the atmosphere was awash with a roasting sensation that was subtly hidden from the senses.

Although the color of the flames were different, but Yō was very clear of the dangers that such a flame posed. For she could sense that this was the same feeling as the other time when Jack had released the intense flames during their time in [Underwood].

The Wind of Purgatory Flames that have been summoned from Hell.

The Gift that just required a mere seven lanterns full to destroy an entire city with its flames.

(*What….What's wrong with this person?! Is she trying to summon the Purgatory flames in the arena……?!*)

The Game had just started and Willa was already planning to use the strongest firepower. The first move was planned to be such a large scale attack on a wide area and such a bold move was unimaginable coming from one who had such a cute look.

Willa was planning to use the first strike to defeat the both of them right from the get-go.

(*Change of plans……! Since she's using the Purgatory Flames of Hell, Asuka will also be in danger!!!*)

Less than a second into the Game, Yō had already shifted her target to be focused on Willa. The situation was already one that forced her to abandon her strategies.

Clutching her [Genome Tree], Yō materialized the shimmering plate leggings of the [Pegasus] while whipping up a dazzling wind to charge towards Willa. And just when she was skiing on the wind and about to land her kick—

The figure of Willa suddenly disappeared.

"This is bad—!"

Instantaneous teleportation—Only those who controlled the portals between worlds would be able to open that [Astral Gate].

This sort of unique portal activation method was fundamentally different from that of Jack's ability to appear from flames.

Jack was able to move from flame to flame, a movement of point to point in a linear fashion, but her sort of teleportation was one that was instantaneous and without any forewarning or relation to any objects or obstacles in the path.

The previous encounter was also similar to this and Yō hadn't been able to see through this teleportation trick of hers.

—Though it was heard of, but it sure is a Gift that exceeded the comprehension of the mind.

That sort of power was impossible to be matched by the speed and power of the five senses. To confront such a power would require a Gift of a completely different nature but now wasn't the time for her to experiment around for the crafting of the new Gift.

(*The Azure winds have not stopped……If this continues……*)

Yō whipped her head to shout at the top of her lungs.

"Asuka!! Quick! Escape out of the playing field! "

"Eh—"Asuka's face was one of surprise and shock and it was clear that she really didn't understand the nature of the threat that was the wave of azure winds.

However, it was clear that there wasn't enough time for Yō to rush to her rescue.

This was merely just two seconds after the start of the Game.

Willa the Ignis Fatuus had summoned [Ignis Fatuus] and caused an azure wind to whip across the arena grounds. Ayesha who had been nominated as the judge had also ran ashen faced towards the outside of the playing field, but was blown into the spectator stands as a wave of hot wind blasted her from behind.

“Oi, Willa-nee, that’s really too exaggerati……Yaaaaaaah!”

Her twintails were emitting green smoke as Ayesha fell into the spectator stands.

The spectator stands were replete with defensive Gifts to protect the audience and so her losses were only up till that point, whereas the centre of the arena had transformed into a gruesome sight.

Exceeding the Purgatory Flames that were summoned by Jack, these hungry flames lit up every single thing that existed in the natural world. The whole combatant area was alight with azure flames and instantaneously reduced the stage to crisp.

And the Azure pillar of flames extended up to the Veil of Little Garden.

The searing heat waves released at the peak were strong enough to scatter the sea of clouds in the sky.

The demon that existent in the cleft between life and death—Willa, had shown a power that was able to devastate everything within the pillar. Of which the spectators had gone silent at that performance.

“How….How can……”

Kuro Usagi’s hands shook as she moaned mournfully.

Willa’s true strength had exceeded her predictions.

Precisely because Kuro Usagi knew what had been released by Willa, she was quivering from the brutal scene displayed before her. If Kuro Usagi’s guess is spot on, Asuka and Yō wouldn’t be a match for her.

Summoning the Purgatory Flames from Hell wasn’t a simple feat.

Willa had connected Hell to this world in that instant—This is not a figure of speech.

Just as how Shiroyasha is able to summon the Game board of [White Night Plateau], Willa had released her spiritual powers to destroy the portal between reality and the furnace of Hell to scorch the arena.

“How dare she…… to those two…… Kuro Usagi’s comrades……”

Kuro Usagi, who had already abandoned most of her logic due to rage, had already transformed to her fiery peach colored hair.

“Kuro Usagi-san, don’t worry. Look closely, those two aren’t hurt at all oh~!”

Jack used a cheerful tone to advise Kuro Usagi who was emitting red lightning while on the verge of rushing in in with that murderous look.

“—EH?” Kuro Usagi gave a stupid cry.

That sound might just have been the signal for a counter attack, or perhaps it was just a pure coincidence.

Ding Ling The scorching azure pillar of flames—shattered under the sound of the melodious flute and chime of the bells.

Part 5

Percher who had walked to the arena location alone was stumped by the miracle before her eyes. It is precisely because of the dramatic changes in the arena that had caused her to have that sort of look on her face.

—That's right. This is not a figure of speech.

The Flaming Azure winds that raged from Heaven to Earth —froze into a giant ice pillar before shattering into fine powdery snow.

"Freezing the entire pillar of flame…… Could it be Asuka—"

Saying that, she looked towards the pits and was surprised once again.

Asuka was no longer in the combatant's ring. There was only Willa who stood in the midst of the whole field and Yō who had fled to the skies. And instead of what used to be the ground of the arena—An Iron sphere that did not seem to exist earlier stood in its place.

(*That sphere……Deen couldn't have transformed into that big a sphere.*)

On the arena grounds where the purgatory flames raged on, the mysterious sphere was completely without a scratch from the onslaught. A faint electrical flow could be seen dancing along the surface of the Iron sphere and it gave off the feeling of being an impregnable defense against anyone's approach.

The whole stadium fell into silence and from the centre of the arena—came the voice of Asuka, from the centre of the frozen winds.

"It's okay now. Release the protections, Alma."

{“Understood, my master.”}

—*Plonk* The sphere gave a bounce.

The icy cold steel cage exterior seemed to pulsate before transforming together with a fizzle of lightning around it.

Long majestic horns, powerfully built four limbs and hooves, silvery fleece that continued to sparkle with electricity. A majestic looking Mountain goat Divine Beast stood by the side of Asuka, guarding her.

(*Mountain Goat……Divine Beast? And able to emit lightning? That can’t be just any ordinary Divine Beast!*)

This saying has always been passed down in the legends, that Gifts of ‘Thunder’ are the symbols for the highest of the God-class spirits. ‘Thunder’ was the last natural energy that Mankind managed to bring under control, and has been able to maintain the eternal respect and faith since the ancient times.

The Japanese pronunciation of ‘Thunder’ can also be written as ‘God’s roar’. Violent winds, rain and the roar of thunder were a collective of fears that wasn’t only limited to Mankind but many other races as well, being one of the oldest faith of all.

God-class spirits of the Elder God’s end of the spectrum will gradually find it more difficult to carry lightning as they get closer to the normal Gods end of the spectrum.

(*That’s strange……That Mountain goat Divine Beast obviously has a greater strength than Asuka. How did Asuka manage to tame such a monster?...*)

“Percher! What are you doing in this kind of place?”

Percher who quickly returned her thoughts to the present turned her head hurriedly. The people who had called out to her was Jin and the others who had went their separate ways before the Corridor of Displays.

The trio ran towards Percher whom they had coincidentally met up and noticing that Rin's nowhere to be seen, they had asked:

"Where's Rin?"

"No, no idea. She said about having something urgent to do and so we went our separate ways. As for what the matter is about, I guess His Highness is the person you should ask right?"

"Hm? Oh, that's okay. I know about that. Rin should now be trying to catch the culprit of the 'Kamikakushi' currently, am I right?"

"Is that so?"

"Because she did say something about finding some clues—Compare to that, take a look at the arena. I must say that this Game looks to be getting quite interesting."

His Highness narrowed his golden irises as he gave a cheerful laugh.

Leaning on the rails, he seemed to scrutinize Asuka and the Mountain Goat Divine Beast with an assessing gaze.

"Seemingly like a puppet but yet not a puppet. After all it does have a conscious will of its own and it looks to be alive. I wonder who could have created such a masterpiece."

"Um……It probably is the Gift created by Jack and Willa-san of [Willo O' Wisp], I think."

Jin opened his mouth to give a casual reply and His Highness nodded his head in understanding.

“[The Demon of the Azure Flames]…… the demon who controls the portal between life and death? I see, that does seem likely. For that woman to bestow life wouldn’t be too difficult. That guy is probably the reincarnation of the Divine Beast.”

“Reincarnation?” Jin and Percher tilted their heads.

His Highness gave a smile as he pointed towards Ayesha who had fainted amongst the spectator stands.

“Take for example that gnome. She’s a gnome that has been implanted into the body of a dead person, to be born as a new life form. Most living bodies basically lose their spiritual attainment after death, but there are some that might even continue to live on after death and be reincarnated into the next life.”

“……Did you mean resurrection?”

“Of course not! How is that possible? A new life possess the inheritance of a new personality. Moreover, for the dead to completely return to life would require operating an independent cosmology. [The Demon of Azure Flames] has not reached that level of power yet. Although the spirit would more or less retain part of its memories, but what it really gets to inherit would be the appearance only. In that sort of reincarnation, the spiritual power would surely deteriorate—”

Suddenly, His Highness stopped his words.

The smile he had earlier was now wiped off his face as he took on a surprised look to stare at the Mountain Goat Divine Beast.

(*……if it is through the process of reincarnation, the spiritual power would surely deteriorate. Because the amount of spiritual power that will be passed down to the reincarnation would be dependent on the spiritual power of the next generation. In normal cases, Divinities of their past lives would also be returned……Then why is it that that Mountain Goat is still materializing as a Divine Beast?*)

His Highness was full of doubts as he stared at Asuka with his sharp gaze.

In the war at [Underwood], he had heard of the Gift held by Kudou Asuka.

According to Aura who had fought against her, she was of an unknown birth, but she was able to control a fire that could render [The Death Eye of Balor] ineffective.

Hence, His Highness had speculated that she had some sort of super powerful God killing Gift that was similar to the Garuda Phoenix lineage.

(*But, this guy isn't of the same kind. To increase the spiritual power would require the bestowing of Divinity or an ability of a large area of effect sort—No matter what the matter might be, it's all beyond the abilities of the Human realm of influence.*)

His Highness stared down upon Asuka and the mysterious Divine Beast.

Following that, he caught sight of Kasukabe Yō, who had fled to the skies, from the corner of his eyes. Yō had used the [Genome Tree] to incorporate the Gifts of the Salamander and Rat, wearing a 'Fire Rat' leather lamellar armor that enabled her escape from the violent storm of the Purgatory flames.

(*Oh? This one used the [Genome Tree] to escape death? Seems like the Purgatory flames of Hell are unable to kill the rat born from the placenta of the flames.*)

But using the Salamander and Rat to combine into the ‘Fire Rat’ wasn’t a very good plan for it was equivalent to announcing to others about your real powers. It is best to stick to simple combinations to not let the cat out of the bag about the fact that she controlled the Phylogenetic Tree.

(*Although it is a little rough and childish……but this [No Name] is quite the treasure trove that I’ve expected it to be. It would be best if I can pack them up and bring along as a take-away.*)

His Highness twitched the corners of his lips into a smile. Having the joyous smile like a child having gotten his hand on a new toy, he also started to have that scary look of wanting to snatch everything within his sight away for himself.

Jin gave a sidelong glance at His Highness before turning his gaze downwards quickly to scan the spectator stands.

“……Ah, Kuro Usagi! And Jack!”

Hearing her name being mentioned, the rabbit ears perked up with a swish.

Kuro Usagi looked around for a long time before finally spotting Jin in the spectator stands above.

“Jin-bocchan! What are you doing there?!”

“Yaho? Sandra-sama is also there!”

“I brought Jin around the city for a little walk. Nice to meet you, [Highborn of Little Garden]-san, it’s been some time since we met.”

Sandra was wearing a joker face smile while using a matured tone to casually tell a lie. Having gotten used to the role of a master, it might even be possible that she's unexpectedly good at acting.

Laius was originally depressed but upon seeing the Master Sandra, he immediately stood up to reveal a sincere smile that was never seen before from him while making way for them to sit beside him.

"Well, isn't this Sandra-sama of [Salamandra]? I didn't expect to meet you in the common spectator stands! Come, have a seat!"

"That's really gracious of you, thank you, Laius-sama. You have also arrived in the North side territories huh?"

"Yes. I couldn't take the atmosphere of the East Side country lands and was attracted by the cultured civilization of the North. And currently we of [Perseus] have established a relationship with this Jack o lantern's Community."

"That sounds great. [Will-O'-Wisp] is in the midst of ascension, obtaining the help of [Perseus]'s Gift bestowing techniques will surely be like a Dragon with the addition of wings to soar through the Little Garden. Please do impart to them your valuable techniques and skills in an exchange of cultures."

"Um…..about that…Mah, I will handle it as best as I can."

Laius gave a spasm-like smile in reply.

Sandra was subtly asking him to 'pass all the valuable techniques to Jack and the others'. With that sort of request, Laius was unable to continue with his accommodating responses and could only give an ambiguous reply.

Having been teased by Sandra, Laius looked towards Jin and the others who stood behind her with displeasure.

Then suddenly, his gaze stopped on His Highness.

“Oi, that white haired brat there.”

“What?”

His Highness had calmly responded to the rude name calling.

On normal occasions, Laius would have been incensed by such an attitude from His Highness. He who had a high self-esteem would never have allowed just a teenager who looked around the age of twelve to use that sort of tone to reply.

But this was a different case.

He surveyed the white haired golden iris boy who was His Highness before slightly straightening his body to ask:

“You…. Have we met each other before somewhere?”

Part 6

In the middle of the blizzard came the crisp sounds of three azure blue gems shattering as they struck the ground.

Those were the empty shells of the Gift falling out of the hands of Asuka after freezing the Purgatory Flames,.

(Uu……Even though the Gems of Freezing are much more expensive compared to the Gems of Flame……)

Asuka was full of regrets in her heart as she lamented over her lavish usage of the Gifts.

However, being the Ojou-sama of a financial powerhouse, she could not allow such feelings to show on the surface.

—Just to mention it on the side, though it's might be a little off-topic.

The reason for the Gems of Freezing being more expensive is definitely not due to the difference in practicality.

The real reason is because such Gifts are able to cause a reversal in the kinetic energy of an object and that defies the second law of thermodynamics; a blessing that is impossible for Mankind to replicate. If this sort of phenomenon were easily replicated, Mankind would be able to craft a Perpetual Motion Machine with ease. Hence, even if it were the world of Little Garden, the only existence that could defy these laws of Physics is only that sole Demon.

And this sort of expensive Gift could already fetch up to the ransom-like price of a Gold coin for a gem!

—Okay, end of the off-topic gossips.

Asuka had magnified the might of the chilly winds to create the large scale “Frozen phenomenon” that was before them.

It was a Gift that was on the opposite end of the spectrum from the Purgatory Flames that was supposed to be able to reduce all existence to ash. Even amongst the Nordic Gods, there’s only one God who can control such a large scale blizzard.

The clash between the two had caused the Game stage to melt into the ground, leaving not a shadow behind. But if one were to strain their eyes to look closely, the faint traces of its existence could be seen and moving out of that ring would be an immediate disqualification.

As Asuka was reaffirming the circumference of the battle zone, Yō dropped down beside her.

Cloaked in the ‘Fire Rat’ leather lamellar armor, Yō dabbed at her cold sweat as she approached Asuka with a smile.

“Asuka, that was great! But how did you make that flame……”

“Hoho, that’s a secret……Although that’s what I want to say, but our opponent doesn’t seem to be a simple one for me to joke around at this time”, Asuka cast her sharp gaze at Willa.

Not bothering to hide her hostility, Asuka went straight for the kill:

“It’s my pleasure to meet you for the first time, Willa-san. Your name is also famous in the East Side where I belong to.”

“……”

“But, I really didn’t expect for you to try kill the potential candidate for your Alliance. I hereby demand an answer from you, the leader of [Will-O'-Wisp]. Please explain your motives.”

Asuka stood with her arms akimbo as she used a threatening tone to question Willa.

Yō also had the same thoughts as the [Duel of Creators] hosted by the Master would surely prohibit the killing of other opponents. It was a well-known rule that needn’t be written down on the [Geass Roll].

Having seen Willa’s release of that fatal strike, it was almost safe for others to assume that she did not want to play by the rules of the Game and or even lacked the basic common sense.

“Please give your answer. Why did you summon such a dangerous flame? Depending on your answer, we might have to reconsider our Alliance agreements.”

“……?”

Willa was stumped for a moment.

Tilting that face that could only be said to be sweeter than candy, she revealed a slightly troubled look as she asked:

“……dangerous?”

“Huh?”

“What. Is. So. Dangerous. About. That. Level. Of. Flame?”

—Kachi, the both of them stiffened at the same time.

Their thoughts and bodies were unconsciously bounded as if cursed.

Needless to say, Willa's answer had shredded their pride into bits. That sort of emotionless reply could be better described as 'Shredding their existence to bits".

Never did they expect that her unsealing of the furnace of Hell would be described by her to be only at "That. Level." For the tone of her words already implied that she had already been holding back.

Asuka reined in her anger while forcing a smile as she looked at Willa.

"Is…Is that so? Well, you're right. That sort of flame is nothing to us."

"Of…Of course. There's totally no problem with that sort of flame."

Asuka and Yō responded with a stammer. …… Those stiff sounding words were definitely not due to a problem with her hearing.

And pondering over what could have gotten into these two people, Willa cocked her head to the left and right like a small animal in confusion while her twin tails swayed with the movement. Then seeming to have come upon something, she lifted her head.

"—You guys, are strong."

"Eh?"

"You guys have underestimated yourself by quite a bit. My words are definitely not in sarcasm. When up against you two, the Purgatory Flames of Hell are not even worth mentioning. Not even close to something that you guys have to fear about."

"……"

Hu. Asuka had unconsciously relaxed her tensed atmosphere that was close to drawing her sword in that emotionally charged situation.

The violent storm of Purgatory Flames were really scary, or at least that was the case in the memories of Asuka and Yō. But after experiencing it first-hand, the both of them were still unscathed.

Every time Yō escaped the icy grasps of Death, she would become stronger.

Although Asuka was troubled by her talent, it would seem that she had finally obtained suitable Gifts.

Ever since the day that they had arrived in Little Garden, the both of them had been accumulating an ever-increasing amount of accomplishments and karma, causing their talents to bloom at an unexpectedly rapid pace. Those were the words that Willa was trying to say.

“Especially Asuka. I’ve heard about your situation from Faceless.”

“Did you? From her?”

“Mhm. Hearing it from her, I’d then created your Gift—[Almathea’s Fortress].”

Willa stretched out her finger.

Pointing exactly at the majestic-looking Mountain goat Divine Beast.

“[Almathea’s Fortress] is by me and Jack……and Lulu working together—”

“Lulu? Who’s that? Could it be that you are referring to that young Master?”

“Keho, What was just said is not counted.”

Willa started all over again, TAKE 2.

"[Almathea's Fortress] is by me and Jack……and Laius working together to create a masterpiece. The current you, can now be on par with FeiFei…Keho, Face.Less. So you should have more confidence."

Willa tried her best to make her face taut with seriousness.

Although she did put in a lot of effort to lecture the both of them, the ending was still far from perfect, having made some slips in her act.

But it would seem that she wanted to continue with that serious act to the end as she spread her arms in a gesture to welcome the both of them.

"……I do not like to do battle nor participate in Games. But for the both of you to realize your true potentials— I've now participated in this competition as the North Side's strongest Player. And I will put my best to make this a token of gratitude to you guys."

"Token of gratitude?"

"Jack and Ayesha have been rescued twice from the hands of Demon Lords by you guys. This token of gratitude is for that", the strongest girl of the North Side smiled.

Asuka and Yō looked at each other before shrugging their shoulders while feeling a little troubled.

"……How should I say it, I think the ones who felt that they were being helped were us."

"Mhm. And we have never returned the favor too."

Nodding their heads, the both of them took on a battle stance to prepare for the battle.

The both of them had finally decided on enjoying the [Duel of Creators] to the fullest.

She of the North Side's strongest player to spread her arms in acceptance of the challenge, how could they suppress that feeling? The problem children of the East Side have never felt this happy and excited before.

"Although it might be tough on Willa-san, we will apologize in advance for doing it two-on-one."

"No problem. I will also show my full powers in the subsequent fight. If you do not do it in a team battle, it would probably be dangerous."

Saying that, Willa started to release Azure winds from her hands.

Although it was of a small scale, contact with [Ignis Fatuus] would undoubtedly cause a fatal injury.

Firstly, they would need to break through that Azure wind. And though the 'Fire Rat' leather lamellar armor might be able to defend, it was unable to launch an attack. Moreover, if they did not have a method to counter that instantaneous teleportation, everything else would be futile.

Yō was racking her brains over a plan to make an attack when Asuka leaned over to whisper softly.

"Kasukabe-san. I've a plan……What's your take?"

"……What's the risks?"

"It's only possible to get high profits with high risks right?"

Asuka smiled mischievously. For Asuka to even mention a plan, it would already mean that there was a possibility of it going through. Understanding that part about her, Yō gave a nod in consent.

“Got it. Tell me about that plan of yours then.”

In the instant that Asuka nodded her head—

The situation had a dramatic transformation.

Chapter 7

Part 1

—[Tablet of the Sea of Stars]. Before the sculpture of the Dragon King of the Sea of Stars.

During the time of which the fire pillar was erected in the middle of the arena grounds, Izayoi and Mandra had arrived at the deepest reaches of the Corridor of Displays—A special Display Hall.

This is a restricted area that did not allow normal visitors to enter as it was the vault that kept the finest sculptures and ornaments worked by the finest of craftsmen. The sculpture of the Dragon King of the Sea of Stars that was displayed during the Birth of the Fire Dragon Festival was also said to be sculpted by the hands of Sala herself; and the green crystalline tektite was also kept securely within this hall.

“But regarding this huge piece of Moldavite,…… where could it have been mined from?”

“No. That wasn’t mined at all. It’s something that Onee-san created through forging in the high peaks behind the Palace using the power from the Horn of the [Dragon King of the Sea of Stars].”

“Hou? Then that means the mountain behind the Palace is an active volcano?”

“It’s already a dormant volcano now……but back to the more pressing matters. Is Sandra really in this place?”

“Hm? That’s not possible right? I’ve only wanted to use this chance to visit the restricted section of the Displays.”

"……what?" Mandra was stumped.

"Oi, Mandra."

"Cut the crap, I still have to find the Demon Lord and Sandra. There's no time for me to show you around."

"Oh come on, don't be such a spoilsport. Do you know the sculptor for this piece over here?…. The one called Koumei?"

Mandra stopped short in his path. Even though he was clearly in a fit of anger just moments ago, but upon hearing the name of 'Koumei', his face had immediately frozen over.

Blinking a few times in surprise, Mandra turned back to ask:

"……why are you asking me?"

"Because the sculpture is in your vault isn't it?"

"No. I mean there should be a certain someone who should know more about Koumei-sama right?" Mandra asked while appearing astonished.

Just for an instant, Izayoi had the stumped look on his face as well, but he soon recovered upon grasping the meaning of Manra's words.

"Could it be….No, is it really like what I thought?"

"Mah, you do know about it after all."

"No, just think about it. We are dealing with a possibility out of an astronomical number of possibilities you know? It is something that cannot be expressed even with the extent of a number in the sixty-nine digits. Or should I say that there really

is a special absurd way that exists in Little Garden to choose the summoned target to be a specific individual?"

"Of course there is."

Mandra replied without hesitation to the question.

Izayoi was so surprised that he almost lost his grip on the sculpture held in his hands.

"……No, That's not right. Please wait a moment, that can't be possible can it? According to my deductions thus far, this world of Little Garden should exist within the time line where all possibilities converge. If one were to summon a specific individual, it would really be a divine technique of finding a needle in the sea."

"Well, who cares about that?"

Mandra gave a terse reply while Izayoi's frown grew deeper as his absolute confidence in his conjectures were shaken.

The trio of Sakamaki Izayoi, Kudou Asuka and Kasukabe Yō had been summoned through different timeframes to the same timeline. In other words, it is possible to assume that the spatial dimension of [Little Garden] is always connected to the timelines of the other worlds or is a dimension that encompasses all the other timelines.

The only reason that could explain the limited points of summoning from the intersections of possibilities is that the density of [Little Garden]'s existence was raised by the convergence of different time planes.

With only a lead for this conjecture, there was no way to be certain about it and he could only leave it at the speculation stages. But recalling about all the Demon Lords who had been their opponents so far, such a reasoning wouldn't hold true.

For example, the case of [Perseus]. They are said to be the residents who have migrated from the mythologies of Izayoi's world and they did not really exist. But if their ancestor was someone like Izayoi and the others who have been summoned from the outside into the world of [Little Garden], that would prove that [Perseus] is from another line of possibility; and Leticia and her Vampire comrades who have originated from the future that transcends the Human race would also make up another part of the evidence.

—A world that mixes the timelines of the future, present and past as well as facts and fictions.

If one hypothesized that Little Garden is a dimension that lay upon or was connected to the various timelines, everything would seem much more reasonable.

(……*But is it even possible to summon a few specific people from the endless number of possibilities?*)

That's right—To be able to summon from anywhere in the countless intersection of timelines would also mean that it is possible to summon an unlimited number of 'Izayoi's. At the same time, they would be summoning 'Izayois who are not Izayoi'. The other Izayois may not possess the same interests as him and would be a completely different person from himself, having a different path in life. The other might even be a female.

The convergence of many different variations of the same person existing at the same time could very well be seen in the situation of the legend of [PIED PIPER OF HAMELN] that showed a clear distinction between the individuals. Stemming from the same reality, the same legend that exists with various factors leading to the same result as well as differing alternatives of the character who appear in the myth, embodying the unlimited possibilities—

Those were the residents who lived in this sort of world.

The ocean of possibilities that was wider than the universe.

Izayoi simply could not fathom the method that could allow a person to find a specific individual from such a vast ocean.

(*Damn. It's just like I'm almost getting it but not getting it at the same time. It would seem that I'm missing the most important factor in the equation somehow.*)

At least for now, it has already greatly exceeded Izayoi's capacity to process the information.

Unable to figure out the explanation to the mystery, Izayoi had fallen into deep thought with a serious expression on his face.

On the other hand, Mandra realized that his words had led to the situation he saw before him and he cleared his throat to add:

"……Hm. Looks like my words were flawed."

"What?"

"To be more accurate, I should say that I know of a person who is capable of performing that method of summoning. Although it has just been a few months since

you arrived in this world, I guess you would definitely have heard of the name during your time in Little Garden. The Demon Lord of the Portal of Stars and Gold—the legends of [Queen Halloween].”

Izayoi’s eyes were widened in amazement and they shone like the eyes of a child hearing of a new toy in fashion.

“[Queen Halloween]……Hah, I did hear the legends of hers. She’s one of Little Garden’s [Biggest three Problem Children] right?”

“I guess that sort of term seems to be more commonly known. But she’s definitely qualified to be a representative for Little Garden. In fact, there are countless Demon Lords who roam the world of Little Garden but the one who can be called a ‘Queen’……can only be her.”

“That really is something noteworthy. Please do give me the honors of meeting such a great person.” Izayoi gave the sculpture, which was sculpted under the name of ‘Koumei’, a light rap of his knuckle.

Although he still haven’t figure out the mystery, but he had found the key to it.

(*Anyways, Kasukabe’s father must have entered and left Little Garden before. If it is really possible to summon specific individuals to Little Garden, …… it might be possible to find and rescue Lily’s mother.*)

The original members of [No Name] which includes Canaria might have been thrown into the outside worlds and Lily’s mother, who is one of them, might have met the same fate.

It is said that Lily’s mother had been bestowed the Gift of Divinity from Ukanomitama and if she had been thrown into the outside world, there might be a

chance to trace the influences of her Divinity in the historical texts to determine the era that she currently resides.

(*First things first would be to try searching for the method to observe the changes in time. Only after everything has been readied and in place, going to pay a visit to [Queen Halloween] then, would not be too late as well.*)

Although he had given up on the pursuit of the answers to his questions mid-way through the conversation, but he was still able to reap an unexpected harvest of information.

It might even be a chance to summon all the members of [No Name] with just that move.

“Thank you, Mandra. Thanks to you, I seem to have found a nice plan.”

“Is that so? Well then, I also need help on my end. Hurry up and get Sandra—”

‘Back’ was a word that never made it out of his mouth as a tremor along the ground cut his words short.

The tremors were bad enough to cause the quake-resistant vault to shake and it was violent enough to cause a few artifacts on display to tip over to their sides.

Izayoi grabbed the nearest showcase to steady himself while shooting a sharp gaze towards the direction of the arena.

“……the epicenter of the quake seems to be very near.” He muttered while sliding into high alert.

The quake just now was definitely not a normal impact.

If those shockwaves were the result of the battles, it would mean that the competitors were of an unusually powerful level; and the participants for the [Duel of Creators], which is hosted in the arena beside the corridor of displays, should be Asuka and Yō.

If it were these two against such a strong competitor—-

“Sorry, I’ve a change of plans. I will be heading to the arena. After all, ochibi-sama might be at the arena too.”

“Ah, Mhm. I will be there as well after meeting up with my military police squads.”

Giving a sidelong glance to Mandra who had hurt his back from the shockwave, Izayoi sped out onto the streets.

—what an ominous foreboding.

He who had crossed between the lines of life and death many times was now feeling an unprecedented chill creeping down his back. Recognizing the threat through intuition, Izayoi charged towards the arena with his face set with a grim determination.

Part 2

— Rewinding time to a bit earlier.

At the corner of the spectator stands.

The large scale Game that is hosted annually had sent the crowd into a frenzy of cheers, but the atmosphere in this corner was a little different from its surroundings.

Upon sighting the white haired lad with golden irises, Laius's eyes had narrowed with a tinge of nervousness creeping into his voice as he asked the question:

"You…. Have we met each other before somewhere?"

Laius continued to stare with a puzzled and surprised look on his face.

That must have been the reason for his staring at His Highness since a while ago. Just for an instant, His Highness had widened his eyes in surprise but his face immediately broke into a smile as he nodded his head.

"Well, yeah, maybe we've met each other before. After all, it's possible that we have met each other during a trade with [Perseus]. Especially since my Community is focused on commerce."

"Nn, Mhm. That does seem to jolt my memory. I recall seeing you from the corner of my eyes during one of the large scale negotiations about a trade……"

Laius had knitted his brows in deep thought as he had a look of being at the verge of remembering but yet failing to catch it tightly. Smiling bitterly, Jin decided to cut in then to stand between His Highness and Laius.

"Laius-san. ……Well, regarding that incident…."

"Ah…… what?"

Jin nonchalantly moved to position himself in front of Sandra while wiping the smile off his face in an instant.

“The incident you refer to—was it the one time that you were negotiating to buy Leticia-san?”

“!”

Because of the unexpected souring of the events, His Highness had an incredulous look of surprise on his face. The words that couldn’t have hit closer to the bull’s eye had stumped him for words and he turned to stare at Jin.

Percher who stood guard behind Jin had also found it difficult to believe her own ears as the train of thoughts in her mind suddenly came to a halt.

(*Jin……when did he …*)

“DO NOT MOVE!”

Kuro Usagi shouted as she stood behind His Highness.

The Spear of Indra was already held in her hand.

“Sandra-sama, please leave! Summon the military police squads over here immediately!”

“Wh…Why…?”

“This lad’s from the Demon Lord Alliance! The Community that sold Letica-sama can only be that one Community—that’s the reasoning right, Jin-bocchan?”

Jin nodded.

Seeing how readily the nod came had thrown Percher into further confusion for that would have meant that Jin managed to figure out the real identity behind His Highness without her rousing her notice.

It wasn't clear if His Highness was also pondering over the same matter but he continued to stare at Jin with a sense of shock and surprise in his heart while blinking his eyes continuously. But he still hadn't drop his guard to show any openings in the meantime.

This pale haired, golden iris lad was still acting casually. Even if he were to be pointed at with the Spear of Indra, he did not even take Kuro Usagi's threat as something that should be noticed.

He stared straight at Jin while asking with a smile of curiosity and amusement:

"Jin, as a subject that I can reference to in the future, I would like to ask this. When was it that you actually realize about the organization that I belong to? I don't get the feeling that Percher's the one who told you about it."

"……From the start. Percher had responded upon meeting you guys with a 'it's been a while'. But —WHEN could it be that you guys have met each other?"

Sandra drew a sharp intake of breath as realization struck her then.

When she had met Jin earlier that day, Jin had also said this:

"In the past two months, Percher had been together with us as a guard……"

"That's right. In the two months that Percher had been contracted to me, she had been with me the whole time. That would mean that there's no way for her to have

acquainted herself to you guys without me knowing. If you guys really did know each other—the only possibility would have been the time that she had been called the [Black Death Demon Lord].”

“I see. You saw through the whole farce right from the start? Looks like I’ve really blundered badly…… No, I should say that Jin’s performance is too outstanding. To be honest, it really changes my opinion about you.”

“Then, you…. And Rin……?”

“Yes, that’s right. Sorry for having lied to you all these while, Sandra. We are whom you guys termed as the Demon Lord Alliance members.”

His Highness gave his usual grin at that.

It was then that Sandra finally accepted the fact that he’s truly a member of the Demon Lord Alliance.

However, in this sort of situation, Sandra wasn’t immature enough to wallow in the sorrows of a betrayal from whom she had thought of as friends.

“……! [Highborn of Little Garden]-sama. Please hold him here. I will be right back.”

“YES, leave it to me.”

Sandra painfully repressed the words that she wanted to say as she turned to leave.

Kuro Usagi raised her divine spear while giving a vigorous nod in response.

Noting that Sandra left the arena grounds, His Highness turned back his attention to focus on Jin as he asked:

“May I ask you another question?”

“……what?”

“Jin, at what stage have you figured it out? I guess you haven’t been misled by the words of mine about the [Kamikakushi]— Actually, you have already guessed the perpetrator right? The true face behind this whole [Kamikakushi] business.”

The golden irises of His Highness were filled with curiosity as he asked.

Jin returned his gaze squarely as he replied in a calm tone:

“……Mhm, yeah it’s wrong. That’s just another conjecture and another type of explanation. I fear that the one who caused the [Kamikakushi] this time is [Demon King of Confusion] who had been recorded in the annals of <Journey to the West>. This Demon lord harbors great resentment towards [Great Sage Equalling Heaven] and to speculate that he’s out to attack the sworn blood brother of [Great Sage Equalling Heaven]—Kouryuu-san, wouldn’t be too absurd. So, the real purpose of [Demon King of Confusion] —had been to target Kouryuu-san from the start.”

“……”

“According to the legends, this [Demon King of Confusion] had been kidnapping the young monkeys from the hometown of [Great Sage Equalling Heaven]. Seeming to be an Ape Ghost kidnapper…but that is not true in reality. The true identity of [Demon King of Confusion] is the reincarnation of the spiritual power representing ‘A Dissolute heart’. He’s the most chaotic of confusions and pervades the gap in the hearts of others to change their personality into ‘一事无成’—the Soul that is unable to accomplish anything. The power of this Demon can cause adults to fall into depression and cause confusion to be born into the world. At the same time, it can

also reinforce the dissolute hearts of children and lead them to distance themselves from their parents. And that is the [Kamikakushi of immature children]— the real identity of Demon King of Confusion.”

—Hence this [Demon King of Confusion] had lost to [Great Sage Equalling Heaven] who had just obtained the cultivation of virtues for deityhood. This is also the proof of Sun Wukong’s abandonment of any negative connotations regarding the character of “混” to become the [Great Sage Equalling Heaven].

“……Your Highness. I would say that we have spent a day with a girl who seems close to the situation that I’ve described, right?”

“Ah, you are right about that.”

His Highness did not even try to deny it as he nodded his head honestly.

Jin gritted his teeth as he suppressed his inner rage and sorrow that threatened to spill from his heart as he stated in a calm tone:

“Your Highness…… The real motive behind your actions are to make contact with [Demon King of Confusion]…… and to borrow his power to cause Sandra to be [Kamikakushi]ed!”

“Wow, this is really amazing. You are absolutely correct on all of those. I really didn’t expect you to be able to see through our act to that extent. Jin, you really make me change my opinion about you.”

The golden eyes of His Highness glinted with light as he gave a raucous laugh.

Having listened in on the conversation of the two beside her, Percher had gone pale as she reviewed the whole incident from the very beginning.

(*In other words……Sandra's slipping out of the palace wasn't really her intention but she was actually 'kidnapped' from the palace as a victim for the [Kamikakushi]……*)

The truth caused a cold chill to run down the length of her spine.

If Jin hadn't met up with Sandra at the palace, she would have already been [Kamikakushi]ed by now and disappeared without a trace. If she who plays the role of the host to the Convention had disappeared, it would surely cause [Salamandra] to disband and the other Masters would find it difficult to collaborate on a united front. In fact, that very moment that they had ran into Sandra had been a miraculous act of fate.

(*I didn't expect that Jin…… could have come up with all these conjectures alone.*)

Percher revised the evaluation she had about Jin at that very moment.

Jin had participated in battles before but perhaps his usual performance had been mediocre at best and seeming a little unreliable. He had then worked very hard to make up for his shortfalls to reach this point.

In order to keep up with the rest of the [No Name]s that had gathered many devilish geniuses under its wing recently, Jin Russel had given his all to accumulate his knowledge and polish his skills.

"……Your Highness. I hope that you will surrender quietly because you should know that it is a stupid thought to try resist in this sort of situation right?"

"Hng~ surrender…?"

His Highness did his best to suppress his urge to laugh as he looked around to confirm the identities of the people surrounding him.

Leader of [Perseus], Laius.

Strategist of [Will-O'-Wisp], Jack.

[Highborn of Little Garden], Kuro Usagi.

Former Demon Lord currently under the flag of [No Name], Percher.

Giving a sidelong glance at all of them, his Highness gave a teasing expression as he laughed:

“Oh well, let’s do it this way. Let’s have a trade.”

“……a trade?” Jin was so surprised that he repeated the words like a parrot mimicking human speech.

Brimming with smiles as though he had just found something good, His Highness said—

“I will let you guys off with your lives intact, so come over to join my ranks, Jin and Percher.”

“What?!”

Besides His Highness, all the rest were stumped for words.

Although it seems unbelievable, he did not seem to care about the situation that he's in. It would even seem that compared to the divine spear of Indra pointing at him, he seemed more interested in the answer from Jin.

The ones who had their lives hanging on the balance wasn't himself but Jin and Kuro Usagi—-that was the kind of assuredness that gave him the confidence to suggest such a trade.

Recognizing the ominous atmosphere shrouding the youth before her, Kuro Usagi started to break into cold sweat.

"Jin-bocchan, you needn't answer. This guy is……very dangerous!"

The calm golden iris gave a leisurely glance towards Kuro Usagi. That cold look was enough to invoke a wordless threat towards Kuro Usagi.

"There's nothing to fear. As long as Jin agrees to it, I will let your Community off. After all it's just the Convention of Masters. For me to close an eye to this whole incident would also be fine by me. Just that this is already a big offer I'm giving for this once."

The golden yellow irises seemed to ensnare Kuro Usagi.

Just like a frog that caught sight of a snake's pointed stare at it, Kuro Usagi who had stiffened up instantly had—

"…… Prepare yourself—!"

Following a loud roar of thunder, Kuro Usagi had released the seal of the divine spear of Indra.

—I cannot allow this youth to exist.

The blood of the War God's Herald coursing through her very being was telling her to finish off her opponent when the opportunity presents itself. Although he might be a very important clue, but now wasn't the time to worry about all those.

If he wasn't finished in this strike at this very moment, everyone on the scene would be in danger of being killed!

"Okay…… The [Highborn of Little Garden] wants to fight? Well, I guess there's no choice then."

His Highness continued to face his back towards Kuro Usagi while spreading his arms wide in a leisurely manner.

Seeming to say 'Bring it on, you may take the first move', His Highness had a fearless smile on his face.

Raising the divine spear, Kuro Usagi silenced the turmoil of thoughts to focus her attention as she took a step forward.

"PIERCE IT…… [Mock History of Poetry. Indra's Spear]—!!"

A sound explosive boom of thunder resounded.

And the divine spear that carried the collective fate of victory shot towards the back of His Highness with an intense flare of lightning.

The weapon which could even strike down the Gods—the spear that would surely strike true to its intended target had released a million volts worth of lightning and charred the ground beyond recognition as it flew towards the target.

The divine spear, which is the tangible materialization of Fate itself as a form of a Gift, only needed to be thrown once to override any other possible futures to pierce through the enemy.

No matter who this white haired golden iris youth might be, he wouldn't be able to escape from this strike!

"What, What's happening?!"

"There's someone fighting in the spectator stands!"

The sudden flash of lightning caused the riled up crowd of spectators to shout and scream in surprise as they jostled and scrambled to get away. Although fights breaking out weren't a rare sight, this particular fight seemed to be of a different scale.

The Divine spear was emitting a large amount of heat and the pressure from its presence had also caused the atmosphere to suddenly expand from the heating. Thunder continued to boom as a series of explosions went off. It was no wonder that the spectators would be terrified.

—However, Kuro Usagi was much more startled than all of them.

The divine spear of Indra hadn't been able to pierce through the back of that boy and it had been merely bounced off.

(*This is……the spear being unable to pierce? What kind of —*)

"I guess it is the incompatibility of the elements. Against such weapons, I'm just naturally resistant to them."

A smile continued to hand on his face while the lightning continued to hammer away at him.

Even if the divine spear was unable to pierce through him, just the mere excess of heat emissions should have burnt him to crisp. But all those were still ineffective against this youth.

His Highness spun around lightly to face Kuro Usagi.

“I’m actually only here to observe the situation today. It’s unfortunate that things have progressed to this point, O Goddess of the Moon.”

“Jin-bocchan! Run now—!”

Kuro Usagi shouted at the top of her lungs but sadly, it was too late.

His Highness casually knocked away the spear with a fist before jumping into Kuro Usagi’s midriff to launch a strike. Kuro Usagi who was knocked off-balance still managed to twist her body aside to narrowly dodge the incoming fist.

Making a full somersault in mid-air and utilizing the centrifugal force to rotate the spear, she swung down the spear on His Highness. However, His Highness did not even bother to defend himself against the strike but merely blocked it with his neck.

(*As I thought…… it must be a Gift that revolves around the concept of being ‘Impenetrable’……*)

There was only one weakness for the holy Spear of Indra.

This holy spear was imbued with the fates of ‘assured victory of piercing the intended target’. Hence, it would be unable to display its full strength when used against an opponent who cannot be pierced.

(*But, since we've figured out that aspect about him now, it would be much easier to get a grasp of his real identity later…!*)

Kuro Usagi did a rapid scan of her entire memory bank.

That is because for a person to be protected by the power of such a strong concept, it can only mean that the Gift existed only through the handing down of inheritance and accomplishments till date.

By means of elimination, she quickly narrowed down the candidates who could be the true identity of the youth to just three. However, His Highness wasn't that lenient to allow her the leisure of time to think deeper into the matter.

Grabbing the handle of the spear, His Highness continued to smile leisurely in that spine-chilling manner.

"I shall give you a second. If you do not wish to die, summon your 'armor'."

"Ugh, You….!"

Hearing that declaration of a killing strike with a tinge of generosity and kindness, Kuro Usagi abandoned her thoughts.

According to the original rules, the [Spear] and [Armor] is not supposed to be used simultaneously. But the next blow of the youth would be impossible to block for she had already calculated all the other risks involved. Besides, her instincts were also screaming at her that the next punch would shatter her bones and body.

Kuro Usagi drew out a yellowed ancient piece of the annals— [History of Poetry· Mahabharata's paper], to summon the Sun Armor that shone glaringly. With that, she who now wore the armor of immortality would be protected from death.

Confirming the radiance of the armor with his own eyes, His Highness channelled his strength into his other fist—

“Good bye then, I didn’t expect to have so much fun with you, O Goddess of the Moon.”

And let fly the punch. Kuro Usagi, who had been hit through the protection of the armor, was trying to steady her stance by exerting force into her legs and feet. However, the brute strength of His Highness was monstrous to the point of absurdity and it punched through the armor’s torso.

(*How can this……?!*)

Kluack The fist had sunk itself into the Sun Armor and with the absurd power from the fist of His Highness that would have shattered Mountains and Rivers—Kuro Usagi was sent flying at the speed of the Third Cosmic Velocity.

“Kuro Usagi-dono!”

Jack, who had been a silent bystander watching the events unfold, made a move to hug Kuro Usagi who was sent flying to decelerate the force.

However, the force that could break Mountains and quake the Earth was too great for the both of them to decelerate and they crashed into the spectator stands together. The spectator stands had then completely crumbled due to the impact and a loud explosion boomed across the arena. Smoke and dust billowed like a cloud from the point of collision. Shattered debris were sent flying into the air and cries of alarm and pain started to spread.

“AaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhHHhhhhh!”

The spectators scrambled out of the amphitheater, screaming and shouting as they squeezed out of the entrances so rapidly that it seemed like how smoke dissipates in the wind.

Although Kuro Usagi tried to lift her upper torso into a sitting position, the best she could do was to prop herself up a little before weakly hanging her head down limply.

“Kuro, Kuro Usagi-dono! Please stay with us!”

Jack’s pumpkin head had also been half blown off by the collision but he did not seem to care about the destroyed portion at all as he propped Kuro Usagi up to help her staunch the flow of blood. Just as he took hold of Kuro Usagi, the Sun Armor had also lost its shine to revert back to the Paper of the Ancient Annals of Poetry. Although it is said to be the Armor of Immortality, it was still limited to one use.

Having lost the armor and continuing to bleed profusely, Kuro Usagi was clearly in a critical state that was life-threatening.

(*That youth……even if it’s a conflicting element, he’s still capable of putting Kuro Usagi-dono out of the fight with one strike……*)

The rabbit who’s well known to be the [Highborn of Little Garden] as the Herald of Indra, Kuro Usagi— had been downed by just a punch. Even if he appeared to be just a child, his real identity couldn’t possibly be that of a Human.

This strike had been enough to cause a serious injury to the [Moon Rabbit] whose famous trait had always been that of unyielding resilience. And with the medical equipment with him at the moment, it was impossible to give a proper treatment for Kuro Usagi.

So, Jack roared at Laius who stood in a daze:

“Laius! Go to the workshop to get the medical equipment! You who can take to the skies should be able to do that quickly!”

“HA, HAH? Why me—-”

“Enough from you, go now! You Baka Deshi! At least listen to the orders of your master at times!”

In the face of Jack’s fierce chiding, Laius shrank away for a moment before clicking his tongue to take to the skies.

Tearing away at the rags that he wore, Jack used them as the substitutes of bandages to staunch the flow of blood.

An unconscious Kuro Usagi was writhing while moaning:

“Jin…bocchan…… Asuka-san, Yō-san……Everyone…Escape quickly……”

Though Kuro Usagi had lost her consciousness, she was still worried about her comrades.

But in this kind of situation, her sense of self-sacrifice had stirred up the feelings that ran contrary to her wishes.

On the arena grounds, Asuka and Yō who were in the midst of their new battle plan had caught sight of the injured Kuro Usagi and instantly threw aside their reason to roar in anger.

“How… How dare you do that to my—”

“To our Kuro Usagi—!”

The duo immediately changed their focus from the Game to His Highness.

Willa who originally faced them frantically rushed towards them in an attempt to stop them:

“No, Don’t……It’s not possible with just you two together!”

But the duo had not heard her cries.

The anger from Asuka and Yō was so heavy that it flowed off them in waves. But that was only to be expected.

Kuro Usagi have always been an important character in the Community and was the mood-maker who kept everyone cheerful and optimistic. It is only due to her efforts that everyone of [No Name] were able to pass their days happily as a Community.

It’s precisely because of her existence that—-The duo had found their salvation in the world of Little Garden.

“I will take the lead! I’ll be leaving the support to you, Asuka!”

“Got it! Let’s go, Deen!”

Although they were emitting an overpowering sense of rage, they were still clear enough in their minds to keep a portion of calmness to split the task with just the exchange of a glance.

Equipping the Pegasus Boots, Yō whipped up a sparkling wind as she closed in.

Whereas, Asuka summoned the Red Iron Giant from her wine red Gift card.

“—DEEEeeeEEEEN—!!!”

The Iron giant descended with a majestic roar.

Deen who had obtained the [Dragon Horn] was now emitting flames from its hollow centre and it gave an inspiring hope of dependability.

The [Dragon Horn] was fully integrated into the Sacred Rare Iron hull of Deen under the working hands of Jack and Laius. Hence, Deen was now much stronger in its freakish strength and explosive flames, with heat rolling off its entire body in waves.

In the meantime, Yō started to gather the sparkling winds under her feet to accelerate her movements. Staggering her line of advance, she got behind His Highness to launch a kick with her full strength.

Seeming to be waiting for that cue, Asuka also ordered Deen.

“Make a Pincer Attack! Deen, go forth!”

“DEEEEeeeEEEN!”

The iron arm, which possessed the ability to freely extend and contract, was wreathed in flames as it closed in on His Highness.

At the same time, Yō with her sparkling winds concentrated around her Pegasus Boots had closed in for a melee.

His Highness who was in a daze, blinked his eyes repeatedly as he looked surprised by their sudden display of trump cards. However, in the next instant, a cruel grin had spread across his lips as he took the battle on with his fists.

“Too weak and too slow!”

His Highness shouted while knocking away Deen’s metal arm with the back of his right fist and using the subsequent momentum to take a swing at Yō which she narrowly dodged by a centimetre.

Yō used that opening to increase her speed to round behind him and kick towards the exposed back.

“You Bastard!”

Yō roared as she launched her attack. Seeing how His Highness was now off-balanced due to his empty punch, Yō was very confident that he wouldn’t be able to dodge this time.

But that strike was still a miss.

“How naïve!”

His Highness who had lost balance, simply allowed himself to fall to the ground on his back and kicked towards the Pegasus Boot to knock it away. That sort of instantaneous judgement and reaction was really an amazing control over his body.

Although it was a kick directed at her scale armored boot, Yō was still sent flying into the spectator stands from the strike of His Highness. Even with the Gift of the Pegasus and Gryphon to soften the impact of the collision, a bone-numbing pain racked through her body.

“That hurts… he’s really strong…”

Using the momentum of his kick that sent Yō flying, His Highness did two complete somersaults to back away.

Asuka gritted her teeth as she ordered Deen to continue the attacks.

“Don’t stop! Continue to press him!”

“DEEEEeeeEEEN!”

The left and right arms continued to extend and retract and forced His Highness into a corner of the spectator stands. However due to the difference in speed, His Highness was easily dodging between the metal arms.

Maintaining sufficient distance between them, His Highness shook his head with a troubled look.

“What a headache…… You guys are the talent that I want on my side……but I’m not good at holding back. If you really want to fight, can you please be more serious about it?”

His Highness patted at the dirt that smeared his clothes as he said those words without intended malice to it.

Staring at the duo with his arms relaxed.

That stance could be said to be an arrogance close to egocentricity. Facing the two Humans who could be hailed at the highest pinnacle of talents, the youth had no trace of fear within him.

On the contrary, it was Asuka and Yō who were starting to understand the difference between their power levels.

Even if they continued this attack and defensive battle for the whole day, they would still be unable to defeat this white haired lad with golden irises.

The duo finally realized that they should not have any reservations then.

“……Almathea, Deen, sorry to call on you guys to reach into your real potentials…… Let’s give it our all.”

“DeN.”

{“No problem, my master.”}

The Red Iron Giant and the Silvery-white Mountain Goat responded to the determination of their master.

“The main force of a Community should never display their trump cards.”—Up till that very moment, Asuka had always been abiding by the teachings of Garol without fail.

No matter how strong Willa’s power might be, she would never reveal the trump card of hers in the [Duel of Creators]. That was the judgement she had made. But against this white haired lad with golden irises, leaving such a hand of cards would definitely cause her to lose.

Asuka drew her Gift Card and was about to release the third Gift that Jack had given to her when—-Yō calmly stopped her by the arm.

“……Asuka, there’s no need to fight any longer.”

“Eh?”

“It’s okay now…… He’s here.”

Asuka drew a sharp breath as she looked towards the West entrance of the spectator stands.

Although His Highness was also confused by her sudden change in actions, he too turned his head to look at the same direction that Asuka was gazing towards.

—Sakamaki Izayoi was standing there alone, surveying the scene with a blank look.

Chapter 8

— Now then, what the hell happened here, Izayoi thought.

Though Izayoi had extraordinary powers of deduction, it took him some time to grasp the tragic situation spread before him. It would seem that Willa and Asuka were relatively unharmed in the arena grounds. But Jack, Yō and Kuro Usagi were seriously injured in the spectator stands.

Normally speaking, one would think there was a large brawl amongst the audience.

However, Izayoi was clear about the true potential of Kuro Usagi's power and for her to be injured to this extent, it would have been a difficult feat pulled off by her opponent. It would be pretty much impossible if it were simply a brawl.

So that leaves this to be the only option open to explain this scenario— The person who injured Kuro Usagi had done it intentionally.

From the first visual scan of their conditions, Yō, Jack and Asuka would have been involved in that battle as well.

"—!"

Then, who could the aggressor be?

Izayoi gave the arena grounds another sweep with his eyes.

The only one who could pull off such a situation would most probably be Willa the Ignis Faatus. That was the rough speculation that he had while in his dazed state— but when his eyes moved across the white haired lad with golden irises, that thought was instantly tossed from his mind.

Staring at His Highness with a lack of emotion in his eyes, Izayoi asked Jin who stood nearby.

"……Oi, Ochibi-sama."

"Ye…Yes?"

"That is the guy who injured Kuro Usagi and Kasukabe right?" Izayoi stated his bold conclusion.

He used a voice without intonation. A tone so cold that it gave goose bumps to all those who knew Izayoi well enough. Be it Asuka or Yō, it was their first time hearing Izayoi speak in such a tone.

Izayoi who held his stare on His Highness continued to approach expressionlessly with gradual steps as he asked His Highness the same question.

"……Were you the one who did this to Kuro Usagi?"

He looked down at His Highness, who was shorter and younger than he was, and asked coldly.

Meeting his gaze, His Highness gave a nod of his head calmly.

"Yeah, I knocked out that rabbit."

"I see."

—In that instant,

Izayoi's eyes had widened to the utmost.

"Then—There's no reason for me to go easy on you, you White haired brat—!!!"

With a roar, Izayoi gave a kick to the back of His Highness's head with a power capable of smashing mountains and rivers.

"Gya…!!?"

The hands that have been brought up to defend himself had been kicked aside and it connected to his head. It wasn't that His Highness was lax in his alertness, but the sheer rage in Izayoi's strike had made it impossible for his reaction to defend himself completely.

Although the attack had almost knocked His Highness out, he was still able to stand firmly on his feet by bringing all the strength and willpower in his body to focus on the present.

Unfortunately for him, that was the worst possible move and it was also the fatal judgement that would seal his fate in defeat.

His Highness should have flown back with the kick when he absorbed the impact.

Just a small distance away and— he would not be caught by the hand of Sakamaki Izayoi.

"You bastard……"

His Highness grabbed Izayoi's wrist and exerted pressure on it. However, Izayoi's wrist did not tremble one bit.

Izayoi had also made a back hand grab for the wrist of His Highness to give it a hard swing.

The impact, which was strong enough to shake the Heavens, caused the floor of the arena to be shattered and it formed a depression. The damage was also so deep that it was enough to destroy the subterranean river tunnels.

Having lost all his control in his fit of rage, Izayoi continued to pursue His Highness to launch a flurry of attacks; sparing no thought for the effects on the surrounding structures. He who usually spared a thought to avoid posing a hazard to others had now unshackled himself from thoughts of restrain.

The reason for him to abandon his beliefs and self-restrain could only be that one reason and no other.

Seeming to blot out the presence of the other two beside her—Izayoi gave a beast-like roar as he confirmed the bloodied figure of Kuro Usagi with his eyes while engaging in a melee with His Highness.

“Yahoho……? This… This looks bad!”

In order to continue the treatment for Kuro Usagi, Jack hurriedly carried Kuro Usagi and escaped into the skies. Asuka had also pulled Yō away, but her heart was still in a turmoil.

It was the first time that she had seen Izayoi in this state of rage; Asuka couldn’t help but to draw a sharp intake of breath while she watched on.

“This… This is really…”

“…… really angry.”

The both of them had long lost the sense of urgency. An enraged Izayoi was more than enough to deal with that white haired lad with golden irises and he would have excess to go around.

The third punch devastated more than just the arena grounds as the damage ran all the way to the Corridor of Displays and destroying it in the process. The force of the punch had also reduced a row of brick houses in the city to a pile of rubble. Just three punches was all it took to bring damage equivalent to the heavy battering of a violent typhoon.

Being hit while in his standing position —on the back of his head, his chest, and his flank, His Highness had vomited blood while falling to the ground as his knees went jelly on him. It was amazing that his body was still intact and for him to remain conscious was already something to be feared.

Izayoi took a step forward with the intention to continue with the attacks as his face was still contorted with anger.

His Highness then lifted his head to fix a look at Izayoi— grinning suddenly.

"……That's so slow. What have you guys been doing just now?"

With just a little more acceleration to his swing, Izayoi would have ignited the atmosphere with the speed of his punch.

Swinging down the fist that he was sure to be his last, his punch had met the air. Because just a breath away from coming into contact with His Highness, His Highness had just disappeared without a trace.

"Disappearing? Could it be that bastard from the day time?"

“Oh, it’s just as you said”, a mocking laughter that sounded like an imitation of a drama actor followed the words.

The voice that sounded like a person intoxicated with himself came from the space above the rubble that was originally the arena.

The figures were overlooking [Kouen City] that was dyed in the yellow hues of the evening. However, it wasn’t just one or two figures.

[The Three Headed Dragon who bites its own Tail]—A strong force had gathered under the Flag of the [Ouroboros] Alliance and their eyes seem to glint dangerously.

“Ara, sorry about that. For you to point out the similarity to the morning incident, it must mean that you have quite a keen eye to notice such details and come up with conjectures. Don’t you think that this intelligence is something that we need to be wary about, ‘Advisor(Maker)’-dono.”

“Stop your ramblings. Just don’t speak to me now.”

Rin chided him in her chime like voice as she kneeled before His Highness.

“Aura, what’s the status of His Highness?”

“It’s nothing to worry about. Although the injuries are severe, none of them are fatal. It seems that all of the impacts had narrowly missed the vitals.”

“That’s only natural. After all, he is our leader. He wouldn’t be that easily defeated by some unknown pawn from their side.”

Behind the lovely looking girl whose hair flowed pass her shoulders—Rin, the strong members have gathered.

A completely jet-black Gryphon with a single horn.

A witch who was clad in a strange-looking long robe.

And a man who stood out from the crowd with his dramatic dressing—dressed in a gorgeous outer coat that was designed with the contrasting colors of red and blue. The man who looked just like a clown was emitting a threatening pressure with his presence, demanding the highest level of alert.

Having previously exchanged blows with them, Asuka and Yō instantly recognized them.

“That hooded woman……was also there at the attack on [Underwood].”

“The Black Gryphon was also there. Looks like that white haired boy is……”

The duo were looking down on the gathered main force of the Demon Lord Alliance as they stood in the skies above.

Victory in [Underwood] had not been decided through ability. That is because these group members were definitely possessors of great power and it would be a bad move to simply jump at them.

Even Izayoi who had forced His Highness into that state was reluctant to simply jump towards them, but merely stared up at them with his cold vengeful eyes. Seeing the enemies whom they would be battling in the near future, Asuka and Yō couldn't help but shiver a little in anticipation.

“They…are the Community that leads the rabble of Demon Lords.”

“The Demon Lord Alliance and the ringleader……”

The two of them hovered in the skies as they watched the situation unfold below.

Knowing that their current strengths weren’t sufficient did nothing to dampen their will to fight.

They had set their hearts on stepping forward to meet the charge if those people were to make the first move.

The Demon Lord Alliance were also wary about the duo as they quietly treated the wounds for His Highness. After having most of the blood traces wiped away by Aura, His Highness straightened his clothes to stand before the group from the Demon Lord Alliance.

“……Rin, was he the one who defeated the Strongest Race?”

“Yes. That’s him.”

“I see. So that guy is also a candidate for the [Origin] huh?”

Blood still trickled out of the corner of his lips as he looked down at Izayoi from the top of the rubble.

Izayoi had withdrawn his hostility but continued to stare at the party who faced their backs to the Setting sun.

As their vengeful gazes met, His Highness suddenly burst into laughter.

“……Hahaha, what a coincidence. For the [Genome Tree] and the candidate of [Origin] to come from the same Community? Looks like I won’t be needing much effort since all the things that I want are popping up one after another.”

"That's what they call the proof of your overbearing power that causes Heaven's will to bow to you. So what's the plan? If you so wish it, we of the Alliance can do it now."

"Hold it. Let's just stop here for today and retreat. The [Salamandra]'s main army should also be arriving very soon." His Highness pointed towards the Palace—The Community Grounds of [Salamandra]'s territory, where some large sized fire dragons were starting to fly out of the Palace grounds.

Moreover, the military police squads having been notified by Mandra about the commotion that had broken out in the place had started to swarm towards the scene.

"Although it is quite interesting to continue the battle with this sort of setting, it would be quite a waste since we have already gotten our chess piece of [Demon King of Confusion] on our side. I guess let's play again after coming up with a nice plan for it…… how did things go on your end, Rin?"

"Mhm. Demon King of Confusion-san is ready to set the Game anytime."

"Is that so? That leaves……only that huh." His Highness gave a throaty spine-chilling laugh.

Seeming like a timed move on their part, the nearby pile of rubble started to shake and out came Percher, from under the pile, and Jin whom she had protected from the shockwaves. They had finally reappeared after being buried a little while earlier.

"Thanks, Percher. You are really a lifesaver."

"……That's nothing. After all, we are related as master and servant, this is only natural on my part."

Fui Percher turned away as she replied.

Looking down at the two of them, His Highness used his friendly voice from before to call out to them:

“Hey looks like you guys are okay. Jin, and Percher!”

“Ugh. Your Highness…!”

The duo had quickly turned to look up while Percher and the rest of the Demon Lord Alliance had immediately entered a combat stance.

However, His Highness signaled to them with his hand to hold off.

Giving a refreshing smile, His Highness who stood on the top of the rubble had raised his voice slightly.

Seemingly with the intention to let others overhear the conversation, he then announced—

“Ah, it’s been a pleasant day with you two today! I will definitely treasure the memories of this day! As for the previous offer—Regarding the invitation to join the Demon Lord Alliance, just think it over okay?!”

“Wha……” The both of them had gulped at that point for they realized the bad situation as they looked around themselves.

When the surrounding area was already teeming with the military police squads, the enemy’s general had shouted those sort of words. Moreover, there would be many eyewitnesses to testify that they had spent time with His Highness earlier.

If this continues, they would be branded as spies and have their movements restricted.

“Highness…. You……”

“Hoho, I’ve always wanted to play this card. How’s that? I’ve gotten the lead again right, Jin?”

His Highness revealed a happy and sincere smile that harbored the hint of making an evil prank. Just like the smile of a little kid who had achieved a half success at making a prank, his smile did not contain a trace of malevolence.

Jin finally understood that this was his way of getting back at him for the things he did earlier.

Facing that pure and innocent smile, Jin couldn’t help but feel the start of cold sweat run down his shoulders.

“You…… are really despicable.”

“Mhm. I know right?” His Highness couldn’t help himself as he giggled.

Rin who stood nearby had also smiled as she looked down at Percher.

“Percher, I’m serious you know? I’m sure that you will definitely stand on our side under the same Flag. I’ll be looking forward to that day when it comes.”

“……is that so? But, sorry, I will be officially declining your invitation.”

Percher had replied without hesitation this time.

This is because she had seen a glimmer of hope from this master of hers, Jin. Although Jin’s not really mature at this point, she was just the same. Moreover, Jin had once talked about his aspirations—If there’s something that I want, I will train myself to reach it first, without depending on others as much as I can.

Just the responsibility of leading a hundred and twenty fates had already made him develop to this extent.

Then for her, who carries the spirits of eighty million vengeful souls, there's no reason for her to be unable to change.

"I'm officially severing my connections to the Demon Lord Alliance. The next time we meet will be on the battlefield……I will not hold back next time as well. If you want to seek me then, you'd better be prepared."

Percher stated the words in a stern voice.

Hearing the obvious declaration of war, Rin finally wiped that cute smile of hers from her own face.

"I see….. Let's see about that then. The voice of eighty million vengeful spirits, would it be able to change the fate inscribed in the stars? Before that dream of yours goes out like a flame in the winds—You will revive as the Demon Lord once more. Don't you regret it then, Percher."

Leaving that prophetic line, Rin had turned to signal the end of the farewells.

And just as she returned to the side of His Highness, a violent swirl of icy wind had sprung up around the Demon Lord Alliance.

Noticing that this was the same technique that was used during the disappearance of Demon King of Confusion, Izayoi stared at their faces while encoding their appearances into his memory.

"……"

"You needn't stare at me. The day will come that we will get to find out who's on top…….That's for sure."

Just at the last moment before disappearing, His Highness had returned the stare at Izayoi with his golden irises.

Izayoi had also met the gaze up till the moment of His Highness's disappearance.

I—will most probably be engaged in a bloody fight to the end with that lad huh.

That was the feeling that he had about the crossing of their fates and it continued to linger in his chest for a long time.

Epilogue

Part 1

—[Kouen, City of Brilliant Flames], Underground Prison of the [Salamandra] Palace.

The murky moonlight shone upon the rugged stone paved floors.

Seeming to be the direct opposite of the cloudless sunny day in the morning, the night skies were cloudy tonight.

Feeling lonely, Percher raised her head to look through the small gaps of the grilled metal windows at the moon.

"……Mah, I guess it's true when they say that you can't see the stars in [Kouen City]."

Percher stood upon the icy cold stone floors as she mocked the light from civilization. If the Chandelier was the Star of the surface of this region, this Star would also be the Darkness that wipes out the other starlight in the Night sky.

—The warm and soothing temperatures and the radiance in the night sky had completely engulfed the light of the stars.

For them who had died due to the weakening Sunrays, there was nothing more ironic than this and Percher's instinct was telling her that she disliked this land of the North.

"But……What do I do from here on…….?" She hugged her knees close as she squatted.

Epilogue

Percher and Jin had been sent into the underground prisons as a temporary measure. Although it was just another formality that they were carrying out and the release would be in a few days, this sort of punishment was still too much.

But the problem was much more than that.

The reason for Percher's worry was about the plans to deal with Rin and the others which she couldn't come up with any.

"Maybe…… it's still too early."

She had declared war on them on impulse, but the real strengths of Rin and His Highness were much stronger than her current powers. The current Percher had no chance of winning against them.

If they met in the battlefield or the course of a Game, she would definitely be overwhelmed before making the move to defend herself. In other words, she would most probably lose her life.

To die before answering the cries of help from the 80 million vengeful spirits, she would be doomed to eternal condemnation.

(……)

Percher wasn't afraid of all those.

It's just that in Little Garden, she still had a life's mission to complete.

She was reminded by the memory of Rin's parting words. Similar words had been said to her by the Demon Lord who summoned her to the world of Little Garden—The man who led the [Grim Grimoire] had tried to probe her determination as the one who embodied the 80 million souls of the dead by telling her this:

—The fate that is bounded up with the disease of Black Death is an extremely strong connection.

Although he had toured many parallel worlds in his journey, he had confirmed that it all ended with the same situation in the end.

Hence, it would mean that this phenomenon is definitely not one caused by a natural disaster that functioned along the lines of the Probability theory of Fate.

But, one that ran contrary to the Fate of the Stars, a Fate that was embedded with a much more absolute destiny involved—

"……Of course it would. After all, the reason for the rampant outbreak of the pandemic had been caused by the solar cycle and that is a fate that Man is powerless to fight against."

Chewing on the idea and noting the immensity that was the size of her goal, Percher hugged her knees tighter.

But that man had also declared it possible for her to change that hand of fate.

He had said that the world of Little Garden was the 'Space where all possibilities existed'.

And it might just be possible to fulfill the revenge against the Sun in the world of Little Garden as well as the key to stop the contagious aspect of the Black Death disease.

Use the vengefulness and condemnation of the 80 million spirits to try change the Fate written by the Stars— The man had thus summoned her to the world of Little Garden with his roaring laughter.

"……However, it seem like he was killed by someone or something and it was all due to him that I got myself trapped in a colored glass to collect dust in some vault for a few hundred years. Haiz……"

Percher gave a sigh at that, which was very rare for her, however, the obstacles weren't just that as well.

Even if she had found the way, the powers that would bar her way from achieving her goals would definitely appear.

The disease of Black Death has always been the foundation for various countries and religion to come into being as noted in the annals. And amongst them were the inspections to weed out the witches during the course of witch-hunts that resulted in a sizable amount of deaths.

Such a strong [Paradigm Shift] that supported the histories of many Gods and their devotees isn't that easy to come by. If the solution were to be found, she would definitely become the enemy of all the Gods and Heroic spirits. It was even possible for some of the Demon Lords to bare their fangs in response to that act.

"I really want to change the Fate surrounding the disease of Black Death……But even if I discuss with Asuka or Jin about this sort of thing……they would surely be against it."

"That's not true."

Yiyah?! Percher was about to make that embarrassing shout of surprise but she still managed to hold it in.

That voiced sounded like Jin's and it would mean that he's been locked up in the adjacent cell with just a wall dividing them.

Percher had been talking to herself all these while as her way to fight off the loneliness. The sudden realization caused her to be embarrassed to the point of rage and her face blushed a shade of peach red as she shouted:

"Se…Seriously! I can't believe this! If you're able to hear me, at least speak up earlier! Isn't that the polite thing to do?!"

"So…sorry. Actually I did want to interrupt somewhere during the middle but I just didn't know how to do so."

"……Hmph. So when did you start eavesdropping from?"

"Hm, starting from 'I guess it's true when they say that you can't see the stars in [Kouen City].'"

"ISN'T THAT LIKE EVERYTHING THAT I'VE SAID SO FAR?!" Percher unfolded the blanket before giving the wall a hard punch.

If it weren't for the wall that stood between them, it might have become a tragic ending for the both of them there.

Because Percher was currently red to the roots of her ears.

"HAaaaaaaah…… Seems like I've chosen to follow the wrong person."

"That…Isn't that line the kind of thing that people would usually leave unsaid?"

“Baka. Of course I said it out to let you hear. Hmph.”

ジン
――はっ、？
知らなかった。……ペスト、優しかったんだね。
ペスト

Percher was throwing a tantrum as she hugged her knees again. The stone tiled walls of the room made it extremely cold during the night. In that sort of situation, it was impossible for anyone to bear the cold if they did not huddle in a corner with the blanket.

Jin was also huddling with the blanket as he spoke to Percher who was behind the wall which he leaned on.

“Oh right, regarding that topic earlier…… I won’t be against it at all, you know? I’m sure that Izayoi-san and the others would also feel the same.”

“…… Then I guess, thank you for your concerns. But be rest assured. I’ve already decided to depend on my own strength to think up of something. I will not give extra problems to [No Name].”

She threw aside the well-intentioned words from the other with those caustic lines of sarcasm. If it were the usual Jin, he would definitely be stumped for words and give up after a few stutters.

But, he seemed to be much more persistent today.

“……okay, I understand. Since that’s the decision Percher has made, I will not pry into it any further. But as the price, could you tell me one thing?”

“What?”

“How did you die, Percher?”

The atmosphere suddenly underwent a complete and dramatic change.

Even with the wall standing between them, the miasma of murderous rage was still able to permeate into the other cell and was directed at Jin.

If it weren't for that wall, Percher might just have ended Jin's life at that point.

"……what a surprise. Why are you bringing that up? Did it seem to you that the cursed vengeful thoughts of mine are deeply rooted in me?"

"No, that's not it. Just that Percher, it didn't seem like you earlier to be so dispirited. I was just speculating that could it have been the prison setting being too horrifying."

"……Uu……!"

The Jin today was really too sensitive to the point of being annoying.

How did he judge the spiritedness of a person? By what sort of standard did he use to figure that out? Could it be that he's just using a conventional expression without much thought? Percher pouted her lips as she gave a sigh.

"If that's the case, I can help plead for them to release you first. The next attack might come anytime as well and [Salamandra] would be needing all the combat strength it can get. If we can first get the questioning over and done with, it would be much easier to think up a plan to get you out of this pla—"

"Forget it, there's no need for that……But, yeah, I'm a little afraid of the cell. However, I'm not the kind to be disloyal enough to leave their master in such a cold and lonely place."

Saying that, she leaned sideways to lie onto the stone flooring. The icy cold sensation seeped through the covers of her clothes and her body started to shiver in reflex.

The chilling touch of the stone flooring seem bent on stealing all of her body's heat and it gave the illusory sensation of a death-like experience.

……She had spent a long time on a journey that caused her to lose her sense of identity or so she thought she had lost them.

However, the memory of welcoming the cold grip of death had apparently been engraved deep in the recesses of her soul.

The silence between them seemed to drag on for ages and the only sounds were their breaths that reminded them of each other's presence. Unable to sleep in the bone-chilling prison cell, Percher finally surrendered by muttering:

"……Jin."

"Yes?"

"Although I hate to admit it, but you're right. ……It was after my contracting of the Black Death disease that I died in the prison cell of my own home. And it was my own father who had locked me there out of the fear of infection."

"……!"

"As a measure to eradicate the sources of infection, my father had ordered the killings of all the farm serfs who had been close to me. Male, female, the old and the young, amongst them were also kids who were around my age……Fufu, now that I recall that incident, it sure was a stupid thing to do. Not knowing that the infection of Black Death is through the contact of contaminated blood and fleas, he had joined the move to exterminate them and contracted the same disease in the process, just like all the other members who participated in the killings. The whole family was down with the disease soon enough and the whole lineage was wiped out just like that. Don't you find it funny?"

Percher had laughed the words out with a tone much emptier than her usual laughs. But reading between the lines would have revealed the amount of pain, hatred, anger and suffering that she had gone through.

The hatred towards her father had never been put out even after death.

"……At the moments before my death, I had shouted a curse from my prison cell at the top of my lungs to make it reach my father's ears: "Die, die, all of you should die." Mah, in the end, it came true and it gave me a small amount of spiritual power as my accomplishment. Well, it's the attainment obtained through the use of curses, you know? Rin had also said that as one of the demonic spirits, such a spiritual attainment is quite a powerful one."

"……"

"Then after my death, I started to wander around in Europe aimlessly. During which I started to meet more people who had died in the same manner. Those people were just spirits which floated around ……but I just felt that they were always looking enviously towards the people who were alive. Unable to bear looking on at their way of existence, I decided to bring them along with me; As time went by, I had somehow travelled out of the European continent to set foot into the Asian continent having had a journey that spanned several hundred years……. By the time I noticed what I had done, it had already become a huge family of 80 million souls. Well, that's it, end of story."

And that was how Percher recounted her life and the path she walked in her second life.

Quietly listening to her recount, Jin held his silence for a little while longer before speaking up suddenly:

“I didn’t know……Percher actually has a soft side as well.”

“—Hah?”

“You said that regarding the people who have died by the disease of Black Death, you were unable to bear looking on at their way of existence, right? So you had searched out for them to bring them along when you left a place right? So as to give them some form of company instead of suffering in loneliness, that’s not something that someone without a kind heart would do you know?”

“……Hmph. Thanks for the thoughts that are clearly partial towards me.”

“No, that’ not the case. At least I now understand the reason for your desire to change history……Mhm, Percher’s really gentle.”

Hearing him repeat it in emphasis, Percher pouted her lips in her little tantrum.

Being praised about an aspect about herself that she didn’t know until now, compared to joy, she was more embarrassed and that made her at a loss for words to craft a reply.

Jin nodded his head as he thought through Percher’s words while standing up.

“—okay, it’s decided. When [No Name] is completely rebuilt, I will come and help you.”

Jin made his oath from the opposite side of the wall.

Percher drew a sharp intake of breath at that as her eyes grew round in disbelieve at the statement he just uttered.

“What?…..What nonsense are you sprouting all of a sudden?!”

“It’s difficult for you to tell this to Izayoi-san and the others right? Then I will do the explaining. Even if they are against it……when the time comes, I will also help you even if I’m alone.”

“That’s not what I mean! I meant that even though Jin’s a good for nothing, you are still a leader! How can you abandon your Community just like that?!”

“No problem. That problem has been solved actually. To be precise, that’s exactly in line with my plans.”

Jin continued to push the topic as he went along with his own thoughts.

Percher was stunned into silence by Jin’s words and she stared at the wall where her Master should be locked behind.

“……Are you serious about that?”

“Yes, I am. About your wish, it should be possible to realize it for the requests of the 80 million souls. After winning the decisive battle with the Demon Lord Alliance and completing the rebuilds of our Community goals……I will be sure to lend you a hand in your mission.”

With a sincerity that permeated through the wall to carry over to the other side, Jin had announced his decision.

Hearing those words, Percher and her master gazed towards each other from the opposite sides of the wall. And her face started to relax into a lovely smile.

“……is that so? Then let’s add this extra condition into the contract.”

“Contract?”

“Mhm. Not only a Demon Lord Servant, but a contract forged between me and Jin Russel. As long as you obey the contract,……I will acknowledge you as my Master forever.”

The full moon peeked out from the cloud cover and spilt the moonlight across the metal grilled window of the cells to bathe the two figures in its light.

Pressing their palms on the wall that separated them, they forged the vows of their special contract within the prison cell.

Part 2

“What’s going on here?!”

Mandra’s intimidating roar echoed around the palace.

After the group from the Demon Lord Alliance have left, the members of [No Name] have been suspected as spies for the enemy. The suspects for smuggling Sandra out of the Palace—Jin and Percher, had already been locked up in the cells below and they were being questioned for their legitimate eligibility to join the Convention.

The trio answered in unison:

“I reserve my rights to remain silent.”

“I reserve the rights to veto your judgement.”

“I will agree with the aforementioned.”

“At this time, just be more serious in answering my questions, you Bastardsaaaaaaaaaah!”

Dong Klack BaBoom! After the continuous hits and banging from Mandra that caused the three types of interesting sounds to be emitted from just the office desk, the desk that is the condensation of the street style of craftsmanship had been destroyed just like that.

The three problem children had remain unfazed by the questioning session and seemed to be giving an accusing stare at Mandra instead.

“Well, in the first place, didn’t Sandra already say that she was the one who pulled Jin and Percher along with her?”

"Moreover those Demon Lord Alliance brats have already been coming in and out of this Palace even from before wasn't it?"

"……If you want to suspect, isn't it more logical to suspect the Community of [Salamandra]?"

Their retorts were logical and supported with evidence and that made Mandra unable to refute.

Although his rage had just increased in its reserves by several times, but he held it back to cool off for a moment. Seating himself once more, Mandra sighed as his head throbbed with a headache.

"Regarding about this incident, we are indeed to be blamed for the neglect. Actually,"

"[PIED PIPER OF HAMELN]—That grimoire had also been bought from them right?"

Izayoi interjected.

Mandra clamped his teeth and bit on his lips as he nodded.

"…… Yes that is so. After Onee-san had left home, [Salamandra] has always been on the verge of dispersing into factions. Even after Sandra assumed the position, in-fighting continued to occur……then it started to become so bad that we couldn't help but downgrade our Community to relocate to the Five Digit territories."

"So in the effort to raise Sandra's charisma in leading the Community, there was a need to defeat a Demon Lord. And the ones sent to conduct the negotiations at that time were these two brats, am I right?"

"No, there were three others. One was a middle aged subordinate who emitted a serious air around him, a woman who was dressed in long robes and a golden haired maid.

"Oh……" Izayoi replied blithely.

Hearing to that point, the start and end of the whole incident could be easily seen.

The Demon Lord Alliance had brought the [PIED PIPER OF HAMELN] to find Mandra to request the summoning of Percher.

When he was still worrying about the capabilities of young Sandra of that time, the other had proposed the idea to him:

"Why not use the cover of the Festival of The Fire Dragon's Birth to invite Shiroyasha over as well? It would be fine that way won't it?"

With the strongest [Floor Master]- Shiroyasha around, even Sandra with her still developing powers would be able to win the battle against the Demon Lord. And those were the honey coated words that they used to coerce Mandra.

Hence the Demon Lord Alliance would be able to seal Shiroyasha with ease and get rid of the soon-to-be [Floor Master] who was Sandra.

"What a nice plan of killing two birds with a stone."

"Mhm Mhm. But with that, there's no way for us to investigate into the Demon Lord Alliance from [Salamandra]'s side……. But just asking tentatively, at that point in time, you guys did not know that those two were people from the Demon Lord Alliance right?"

“Of…Of course! If we knew that, we would definitely have some defensive measures in place!”

Mandra frantically explained to defend his people. And currently, it is difficult to determine who the questioner really is.

Sighs came from a few people in unison as they started to feel troubled about the dark futures that they could not envision about.

Only Izayoi continued to pinch his chin as he pondered over the identity of the enemy.

“……[A Three headed Dragon that bites its tail] right?”

“Eh?”

“The design that was on the Flag they held. At a glance, it looks like the symbol of the [Ouroboros]……just that I’m not really sure about it.”

Izayoi was speaking of something in such an ambiguous manner and that was a rare scenario.

Although he was unsure, the design he had seen on the Demon Lord Alliance Flag was indeed the [Ouroboros]—‘The snake that bites its own tail’.

Asuka and Yō tilted their heads in puzzlement as they looked towards Izayoi with a slight tension in their gazes.

“Izayoi-san has gotten a clue on that flag?”

“No, it’s not confirmed. After all, it is originally the symbol of many things and it should have been changed or modified in this particular symbol. Originally the most commonly drawn logo would be ‘The snake that bites its own tail’. And it is the

symbol that represents ‘The cycle of Death and reincarnation’ or even ‘recycling to obtain something in return’……meanings that are linked to the phenomenon of immortality…”

Speaking up to that point, he then lapsed into silence for a moment.

However, having tossed the idea around in his mind without a solution, Izayoi who temporarily reached that conclusion decided to give a casual shrug while giving his usual loud laugh.

“……Oh well, at the end of the day, we have finally managed to catch a glimpse of our enemies’ appearance. So you two better get ready for what is to come okay?”

Izayoi laughed fearlessly as the duo nodded their heads in agreement.

“Mhm. The day that we will come into contact with them is close and I can almost feel them within my grasp.”

“With this, …. We can get it back finally, right?”

—Getting back the Community’s [Flag] and [Name]. With the clues getting this close to them, the trio were getting pumped up with enthusiasm.

Believing that the battles in the future would definitely be useful to gradually close in on their goal, the trio were clapping in excitement.

“Those people will be revealing themselves in the near future and their targets would definitely be the [Floor Master]s.”

“The full force will be here in three days, so let’s start preparing before that.”

“Mhm. Let’s go report this to Kuro Usagi immediately—”

“Ya, Yahouhoh! Everyone from the [No Name]! Thanks for your hard work!”

Jack the Pumpkin Head had entered through the doorway with the door making an audible *Clack* as it opened inwards. But his laugh wasn’t as bright and cheerful as before. The Pumpkin Head was wobbling slightly and giving off a strange creaking noise.

Seeing Jack who had rushed in with that laugh that they couldn’t make out if he were happy or in pain, the three of them exchanged a glance in surprise.

“Hey Jack, what’s the matter?”

“Did something happen?”

“Are you hungry?”

“That’s only you, right? Kasukabe-ojousan!”

“Mhm.”

Guuuh~ Came the sound from Yō’s tummy.

But Jack ignored Yō as he pointed to the corridors outside:

“Kuro Usagi-san, she…Kuro.Kuro Usagi-san’s in trouble!”

The expressions of the three of them changed immediately as they took on a serious and nervous look. The Palace doctor had said that Kuro Usagi’s life wasn’t in danger but since it’s a severe wound, even if something were to happen after a delay, it would be highly probable as well.

Turning back to look at Mandra, the trio said simultaneously.

“Excuse us for now, if there’s anything, we will discuss it later.”

“Please release Jin!”

“And prepare some dishes for us to eat!”

“There’s no time to talk about that you know?!”

Even in the midst of an emergency, Yō was still loyal to her instincts and she cocked her head in the most serious way possible in response to the rebuttal.

However, it was true that it wasn’t the time for them to joke around and the trio had hurriedly followed the Pumpkin Head to transverse the corridors to rush to the ward of Kuro Usagi.

Arriving at the patient ward, the trio had squeezed in at once.

“Oi, Kuro……”

The word ‘usagi’ never had the chance to come out and the other two were thinking the same thing. The atmosphere they had around them had suddenly evaporated as they took on a stunned and disappointed gaze while looking at Kuro—No , it should be her***(她)***.

“Every…Everyone……!”

The fortunate thing was that she had already recovered her consciousness.

Most of the wounds had also healed and there was no need to worry. But all those were just the minor parts as there was a bigger problem about her that was more severe than the fact of her lost and severe injuries.

Asuka and Yō were opening and closing their mouths.

“Kuro. Kuro…..”

“……Uso?"

Although it might have been extremely rude towards her who had large tear drops falling from her eyes, it wasn’t wrong for the two of them to say that. In fact, it was an accurate metaphor.

Kuro Usagi who lay on the bed crying loudly had pressed the back of her head where her ears were located as she screamed.

“Uu. UuUu… … Kuro Usagi’s Usagimimi… My Usagimimis are gone—!!!”